MYSTERY BIRDS OF INDIA

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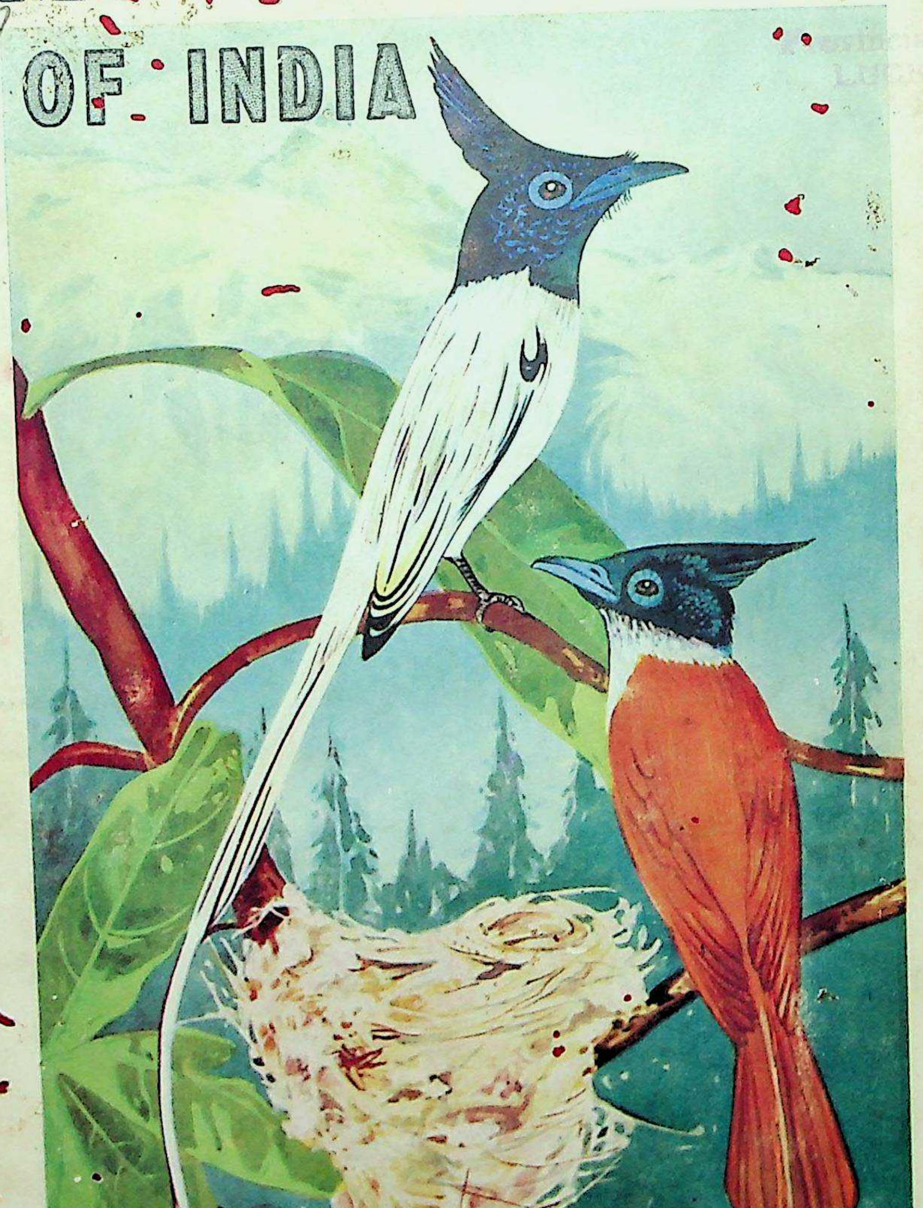

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MYSTERY BIRDS OF INDIA

BY

"SNILLOC"

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TO

MY FRIEND AND MENTOR

STANLEY JEPSON,

Editor, *The Illustrated Weekly of India.*

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear,
But he who has your friendship richer is
Than if he had the treasures buried there.

◆

AND TO

"DONNY"

D. F. S. MACARTHUR,

late of the Central Provinces P.W.D., (Irrigation Branch), in collaboration with whom the author first began to write bird stories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many of these stories appeared originally in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *The Statesman*, and the author is indebted to the Editors of these papers for permission to reproduce them here. He is also indebted to Mr. S. H. Prater, C.M.Z.S., Curator of the Natural History Section of the Prince of Wales' Museum, Bombay, for permission to reproduce some of his admirable sets as illustrations.

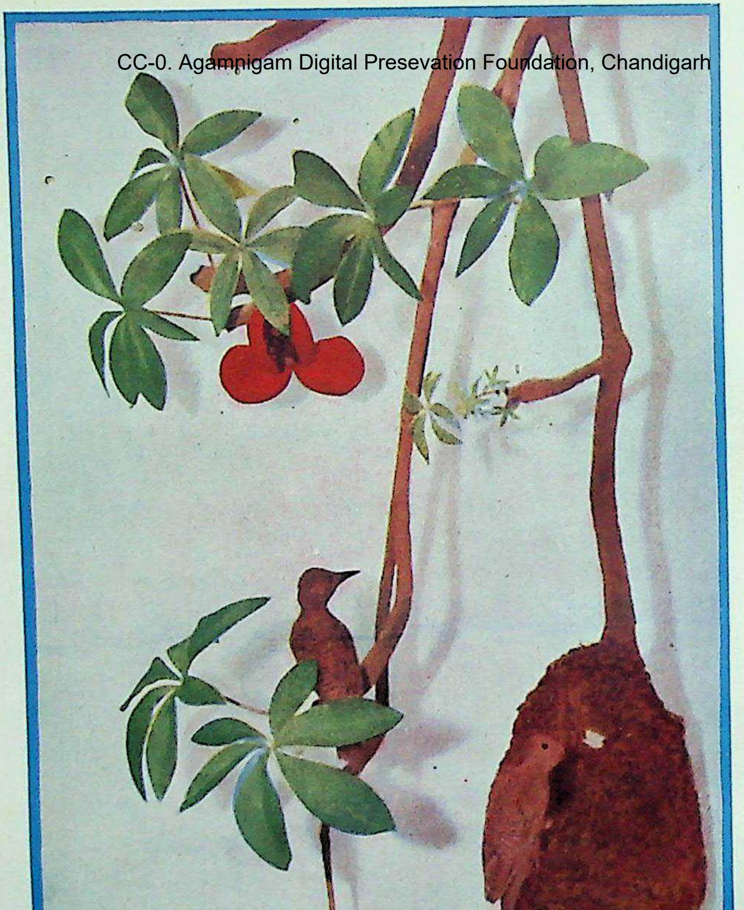
TO HELP A GOOD CAUSE

The author of this book, which I hope is going to be a very interesting one, tells me that he is going to be so very kind as to give his share of the royalties from the first edition to the League of Mercy, and he asks me for a brief account of the League's work. Very naturally and very gratefully I hasten to comply.

The League was founded in 1907. It is a registered Society and has for its Patroness Her Excellency Lady Colville, as of all her predecessors since its foundation. Its work is directed by a committee of capable and influential Bombay ladies. Its aim is to assist women and children who are in moral danger. It has a Shelter in Bombay where and young woman or girl in need of protection can be taken in, and it is responsible for the maintenance and education of a varying number (now about 25) of young girls. Many of these are committed to its care by the Children's Court.

For its income the League is dependent on subscriptions and the proceeds of entertainments, though aided in part by a grant from Government. The many war charities have inevitably limited one source of income, that from entertainments, while another effect of the war has been greatly to increase expenses. Assistance like that now being given by the author of this book is therefore doubly welcome. I look forward myself to reading the book, and, both for the League's sake and the author's, I hope that it will have a wide welcome.

RICHARD DYKE ACLAND,
Bishop of Bombay.



THE SOUTHERN RUFOUS WOODPECKER (Micropternus brachyurus Jerdoni) and the Tree Ants' nest it is permitted to share. Why? Around this unsolved mystery of nature the accompanying allegory has been specially written.

The Rufous Woodpecker

WHAT RENT DOES IT PAY TO THE TREE ANT?

An unsolved mystery of nature is why the savage Tree Ant allows the Red Woodpecker to share its nest. The Ant must get some return, but just what that is no one knows.

Once upon a time, the King of Nagpur had an only son in whom he was very disappointed. This young prince was very handsome and very clever, but he would take no interest in military matters and spent all his time dressing up and enjoying himself in the company of his gay friends.

Now it happened one day that when the king returned to his palace very tired after a great victory which he had just won over the King of Amraoti, the first thing his eye lit on, as his great elephant of state turned into the palace grounds, was this useless son of his, sitting on a lawn surrounded by a number of musicians and enjoying a concert. A sudden fury seized the king, and, alighting from his elephant, he drew his sabre, rushed up to the prince and struck savagely at him.

But happily for the prince, one of his friends managed to thrust the long handle of his banjo-like musical instrument in the way, so all that the sabre did was to give the prince a gash on his shoulder, from which the red blood poured down his beautiful silk coat. Some courtiers rushed up and seized the king's arm, begging him not to strike again, while others hurried the prince away to attend to his wound.

But the prince refused to allow any one to touch his wound, saying he would go before his father in those very blood stained robes and demand an explanation for the assault. This he did, but although he had hoped that by the time he eventually appeared before his father, the old man's rage would have somewhat abated, he was terribly disappointed.

The king was just as angry as ever and told his son that unless he mended his ways and paid some attention to soldiering, he would stop all allowances which were paid to him from the Treasury.

The prince remained adamant. He would not do any soldiering he declared flaty; and as for the allowance, he cared nothing about it, because he could always get as much money as he wanted.

As the months passed and the prince maintained this boast of his, the king grew more and more surprised. He tried by every means in his power, not excepting the bribing of his son's wives and closest friends, to find out from where the money came. But in this he failed, as he also failed in any endeavours he made to try and induce the prince to wear something other than the blood-stained garments he insisted on putting on ever since his open quarrel with his father.

At last the king could stand this no longer, and in another outburst of rage he had the prince seized and locked up in a tower, where he ordered that he should be given no food beyond just one *chapatti* and a mug of water every day. The courtiers, who were sorry for the prince, tried to reason with the old king, but he would have nothing to do with them and declared that if any came again to plead with him on the prince's behalf, he would have them trampled under the feet of his great war elephants.

While these arguments were going on, a man suddenly rushed into the durbar hall and informed the king that some hundreds of bandits had come down from the hills round about and were storming the prince's tower in an effort to release him. The king hurried out with his soldiers, and such a fierce battle began that the ground on which they fought was soon carpeted with the dead and wounded.

But although the king's troops were much stronger than the savage dacoits, these courageous men refused to surrender, and the battle might have gone on until one or both sides were absolutely wiped out, had not Brahma, the Creator, suddenly taken compassion upon these mistaken men and come down from Mount Kailas to put a stop to the fight.

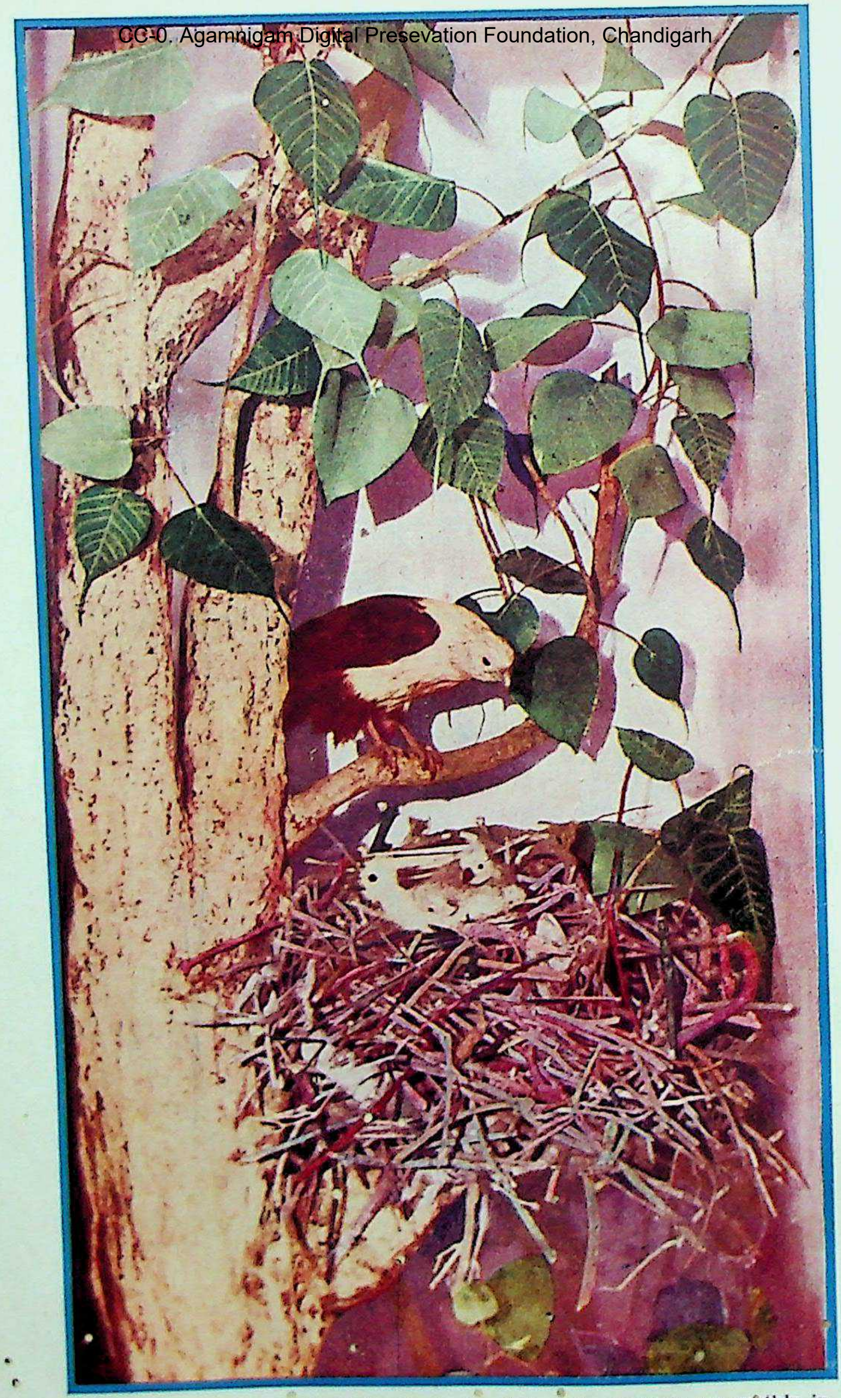
He told the king he must make peace with the prince, but the king refused to do so until such time as the prince told him what he was giving to the dacoits in exchange for the money which they were obviously giving him.

The prince refused to divulge this secret, saying that he would keep it and would continue to wear his blood stained robes till the day of his death.

So adamant were the pair of them that Brahma could not resolve the deadlock. So leaving the king in possession of his throne, he decreed that the prince and his doughty brigand followers should always live apart and preserve their secret from mankind.

He turned the prince into the little Rufous Woodpecker, which still wears that mantle of blood-stained clothes, and he turned the dacoits into the savage little Tree Ants, in whose "castle" on the branch of some tall tree—as their lairs on earth were once built on the crests of lofty hills—the Rufous Woodpecker even today builds its nest.

Naturalists know that the beak of the Rufous Woodpecker is softer than the beaks of other woodpeckers, so it cannot, like them, burrow a nesting hole in the trunks of old trees, but they have never been able to discover that secret that Brahma decreed must always be preserved—they do not know why the savage Tree Ant, which guards its nest so ferociously against all other intruders, should allow the Rufous Woodpecker to nest there, and what it gets by way of "rent" in exchange for this privilege!



HILIASTUR INDUS INDUS, the Brahminy Kite. Young birds are earthly in colour like Milvus Migrans Govinda, the Common Kite, but can be distinguished by their tails, which are rounded, not forked.

The Brahminy Kite

WHY IS IT A WATER FEEDER?

Flying over every Indian town or city situated near the sea, a river or a large lake, one sees the Common Kite, brown of body, 'bete noir' of the crow, and the Brahminy Kite. Both swoop for scraps, yet the one confines itself rigorously to the land, the other to the water. Why? The story is told in this allegory.

Once upon a time there was a great and wise king who had his capital at Kalyan, down by the sea, and ruled almost the whole of Western and Central India. He was a very clever general, so he led his almost invincible armies out and conquered more and more territory; and as he was as good and as just an administrator as he was a soldier, the people he conquered were glad to submit to his rule.

Thus in a very little time his subjects, under his able guidance and strong protection, waxed exceedingly rich, and the money and wealth that steadily accumulated in the King's Treasury, called the Kalyan Khajana, reached fabulous proportions; so much so that the richer and stronger he grew, and the more kings and princes he managed to overcome, the prouder and the more arrogant did this king grow, until at last he gave out that he was not a human being but a god.

When the real gods on Mount Kailas heard of this boast, they laughed heartily and decided that they would take this proud man down a peg or two. He had everything except a son to carry on his name, and so the gods sent him one day twin boys as a gift.

The king was delighted. He ordered double celebrations all over his kingdom, and from their seat on Kailas the merry gods looked down on the vast illuminations, the tremendous feasts, the dances and the wonderful displays of fire-works that marked the advent of what they intended should be the curse of the proud king's life.

The princes grew up. They were both splendid young men, very good to look upon, strong, immensely clever; but alas! with each other they simply could not agree. Anything which one had the other desired, and they fought and quarrelled incessantly.

Sick and tired of the pair of them, and quite unable to control their tempers, the father at last banished them from the court to be governors of provinces at the extreme ends of his dominions. Separated thus, he thought they would behave themselves, but the hatred between them was not subdued in this way.

One of them heard that the other had taken a very beautiful princess as his bride, so he promptly raced down from his own province and carried the girl off. This resulted in a tremendous war, and the brothers kept on hammering at each other, laying waste the country and killing and plundering the people, who soon began to complain very bitterly.

They besought the king to put a stop to this misbehaviour and to restore the peace and prosperity of the early days of his reign.

The king tried to reason with the princes, but seeing that they would not mend their ways, he at last marched out from his capital with a great army to subdue them. And now a surprising thing happened—the brothers promptly combined their forces and the king's army was defeated and put to flight. The king himself escaped to his capital, where, now in mortal terror of his life, he shut himself up in his fortress palace.

Then down on Kalyan swept the princes, each determined to get the throne for himself; and there no longer being any common enemy for them to combine against, they continued their war just outside the walls behind which their father sat grieving so bitterly.

Each day the old man used to look down from his tower and watch the fortunes of the battle sway now this way now that, and he watched too with growing alarm the crowds of birds of prey that came to feed upon the corpses of the slain. They were to him emblematical of the trouble, pain and ruin which his sons had brought on his beautiful kingdom.

And then one day, when he could bear this no longer, the old man fell on his knees and prayed to the gods to forgive him for his sin of having set himself up as their equal.

Their purpose accomplished, the gods decided immediately to forgive the old man, and Brahma sent Vishnu, the Preserver, down to restore peace. In a flaming charriot drawn by four glorious horses, the god suddenly swept down from the heavens and drove through the ranks of the contesting armies, who, paralysed by the sudden vision, fell back and made way for him.

Before the gates of the palace Vishnu drew up and commanded the king and the two princes to appear before him. The king came crawling on his knees, but the princes swaggered, hands on the jewelled hilts of their sabres, their mien as proud as ever. Vishnu demanded that they should follow their father's lead and humble themselves, but in their arrogance they refused, saying that their father was a beaten man and no longer a king, while each of them claimed absolute lordship over all his territories.

They were about to begin their everlasting quarrel again, but Vishnu suddenly caused them to look upon him and they were blinded by his spectacular glory. Now, their sight lost, their hope gone, their minds full of the realisation of who this kingly-looking person really was, the princes were filled with consternation and fell down on their faces, praying for forgiveness.

"Restore to us, O Lord, the sight of our eyes," they prayed fervently, "and thy wishes in future shall be our commands."

Vishnu told them that he would restore their sight, but he would no longer permit them to dwell on earth, where they had caused so much misery and terror. They would in future, he said, be beggars feeding from the hand of man. But he would give each one the choice of the sphere in which he should feed.

"Go," he ordered, "whither thou wilt, remove the scales from thine eyes, and return here before me."

The brothers staggered off, and before very long one of them, slipping in a pool of blood which had poured from a slain warrior, fell to the ground. Seizing the damp earth he rubbed it over his face and cast dust over his body, crying, "Alas, alas, how foolish have I been!" While in the midst of this, his sight suddenly returned and he came crawling back to kneel before Vishnu and await his decree.

The other prince had staggered down to the sea shore, where he put his head in the water and struggled to wash the scales from his eyes. Presently his sight also was restored, and when he again stood before Vishnu, the white salt from the sea caked his head and shoulders.

Then Vishnu made his pronouncement: "Thou," he said to the first prince, "shalt be of the land, and thou (to the other) shalt be a thing of the sea with the salt of it forever upon thee, as it is now."

We waved his hand and immediately the princes were turned into the Common Kite and the Brahminy Kite, which, though living together today, never encroach upon each other's food preserves, for while the Common Kite picks up the morsels and the refuse which man throws out upon the land, the Brahminy feeds from the water.

It is a common sight to find this beautiful bird, with its white head and chestnut body, contesting with gulls for scraps thrown overboard from ships in Indian harbours.

The Rosy Pastors

"WINE BIBBERS" OF BIRDLAND

In many parts of the country, when the crops are growing ripe, villagers bring round for sale the partly-roasted carcases of the Jowari Bird. This is none other than the Starling—grain thief and drinker of the liquor found in the crimson flowers of the Bombax and the Coral tree.

Once upon a time in the great city of Assur on the Tigris, capital of Assyria, then the strongest Power in the world, there lived a young man, a wild reckless fellow much given to wine and riotous living, who drove the war chariot of the mighty monarch, King Tiglath-Pileser I.

Now it happened one day that the king was standing in his chariot on a sandhill, watching the tide of a battle going inexorably against him. Clever general though he was, that day he could make no impression on the enemy, and when the left wing of his army suddenly collapsed and fled, he cried out in great anguish, "Alas! the day is lost!"

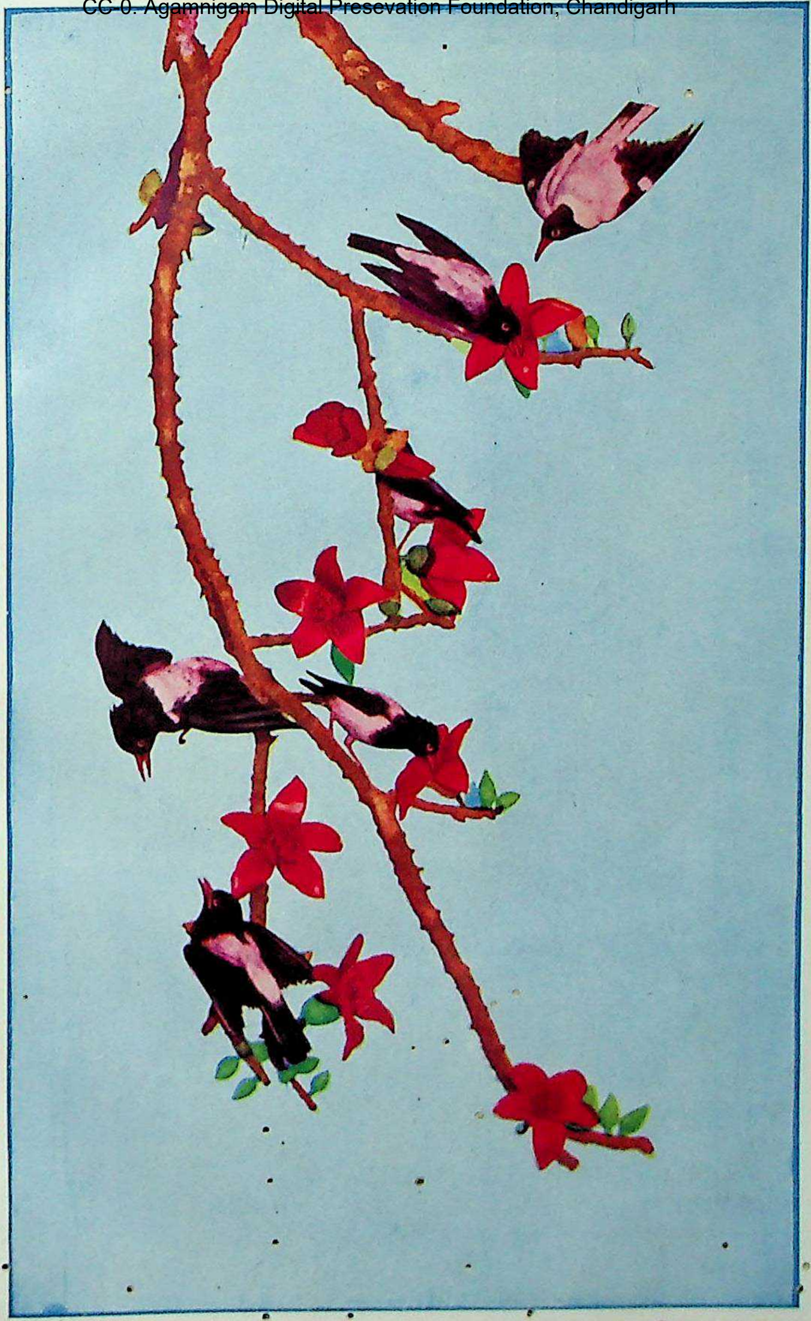
But the Charioteer raised his whip and pointed, saying: "Nay, Majesty, the day is not lost. Look yonder. If you will but send up your remaining reserves under cover of those dunes and attack the enemy's left, you will be able to roll them up on their centre, and so will the day be saved."

Quick to realise the wisdom of this plan the king rushed his reserves forward, and within three hours had won the most famous victory of his reign. That evening, as he rested in his silken pavilion on the battlefield, with his applauding generals around him, he sent for the clever young Charioteer and presented him to them.

"This is the man who really won the day," he said. "He is a military genius. In his hands the reputation of our armies and empire will be safe. Henceforth he shall be your leader. Obey his orders as if they were mine."

The generals were stunned, but they dared not disobey lest their heads be cut off. However, they pooled their inventive genius and sedulously poured into the king's ears lurid tales of his new C-in-C's debauchery and profligate ways, hinting strongly that the increase in crime in the cities was his doing, since his need of money for gay living was now unlimited.

For many months, during which the young Charioteer led the armies of Assyria on other victorious fields, the king refused to listen to anything against his new



IN THE HEART of the big, crimson, fleshy flowers of the Bombax, nature stores a potent spirit, to drink which the merry Starlings or Rosy Pastors (Pastor roseus) come all the way from their breeding grounds in Mesopotamia and Syria. With them is a Black-headed Oriole (Oriolus Xanthonus).

favourite, but when a dancing girl of whom he was passionately fond suddenly vanished from court, and he was told the C-in-C had spirited her away, his rage knew no bounds. Hotfoot he sent his police to apprehend the young fellow, whom he ordered to be publicly tortured and executed that very afternoon.

The news of the arrest created no end of a sensation, and by noon the great square in front of the palace was thronged with people, who had come—well, that they hadn't come to "see" the execution became apparent when a military escort appeared with the victim. A wild riot broke out, and while some of his friends rushed to the Charioteer's rescue, others caught and thrashed the fat court dignitaries who had tried to ruin him.

The king, half angry at the unseemly tumult, half amused at the antics of his ministers, was trying to make up his mind as to what he should do, when his jaw suddenly dropped open and his eyes popped with amazement: for elbowing her way through the crowd came the vanished dancer. She had not been abducted by anyone, she said, but had gone to see her mother.

King Tiglath-Pileser's anger knew bounds. He caused the men who had poisoned his ears to be brought before him; had them stripped of their fine robes and beaten, then sent them crawling on their hands and knees to tell the young Charioteer that he was forgiven. But when, covered with the dirt the angry, jeering populace had showered on them, they arrived at his house, they found the Charioteer had left the city, vowing that never again would he entrust himself to the tender mercies of one so fickle and hasty as the king.

He and his followers betook themselves to the wild places of the kingdom, from where they constantly swooped down on the royal treasuries and officers, looting the former and robbing and beating up the latter with a fiendish enjoyment. First to the king's promises of forgiveness and reinstatement, then to his threats of extermination, the Charioteer turned a deaf ear, for from the armies the king sent against him he just fled, but smaller bodies of troops he scattered with great energy.

Now it happened that about this time a traveller arrived at Assur with wonderful tales of the fine land of Hindustan—of its wealth, its beauty, its fertility, the loveliness of its women, the magnificence of the court—and as Tiglath-Pileser listened to these tales, he had a brainwave. He let it be known that he had sent emissaries to the Emperor of Hindustan to ask for the hand of his daughter in marriage, and as these emissaries had been badly treated and sent back with insulting messages, the honour of Assyria demanded that the offenders be punished by an invasion.

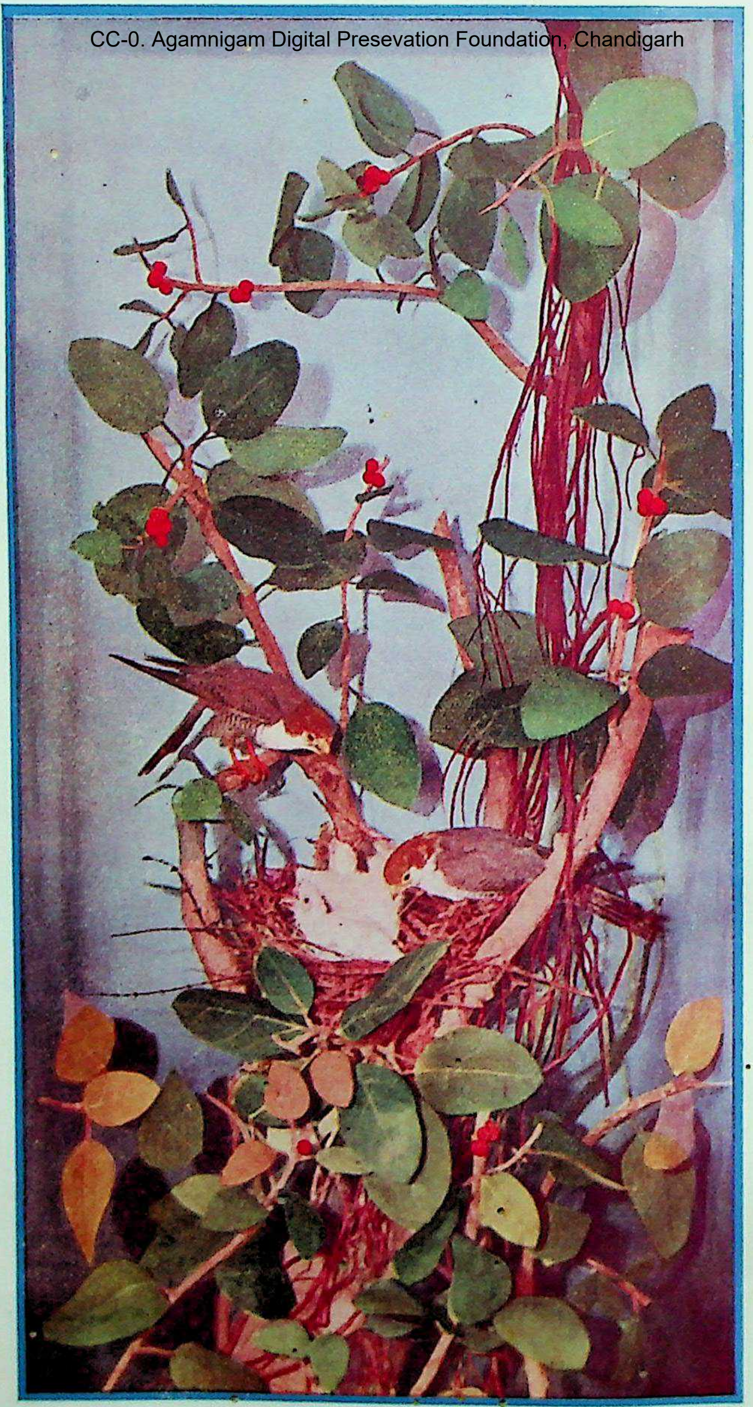
When the Charioteer heard this, his blood was fired, and he instantly volunteered to lead the army, at the head of which he eventually burst into Hindustan to plunder and lay waste the land. But the nautch girls and mohwa spirit soon got him, and in the languorous land of the lotus he and his men forgot Assyria and the burning heat of the deserts.

But their "holiday" was short-lived, for as the Indian sun too began to burn, they had word of an Egyptian invasion sweeping into Assyria along the valley of the

Tigris. The call of blood and patriotism proving stronger than the grip of the lotus, the Charioteer and his men shook off their lethargy and, promising the weeping maidens that they would return, hurried home.

In the van they attacked, in the forefront of the battle they died—but not before they had smashed the invader's armies and saved their native land, and when their bodies were collected for a great state funeral, it was seen that every breast was red with blood. No man of them all had a wound in his back.

At the pyre, as King Tiglath-Pileser, who was also the Chief Priest, raised his hands to heaven and prayed that the gods would suitably reward these brave men in the after life, the corpses suddenly turned into the merry Rosy Pastors or Rose-breasted Starlings we know today. Annually they visit India, where they carouse and chatter merrily at the "pubs" Nature has provided for them.



IND'S FEATHERED "BOMBERS." Falco chiquera chiquera, the Red-headed Merlin, is peculiar to India and one of her fastest fliers. Widely distributed, these birds are hunters in fields and light scrub, and can be trained for hawking, though they never attained the popularity of the Shahin.

The Red-Headed Merlin

WHY IS SHE LARGER THAN HER MATE ?

Most males, married or single, will readily concede that the female of the species is far fiercer than the male, but she isn't usually the bigger of the two, as in the case of the Merlins. The reason for this is the subject of this allegorical story.

Once upon a time there lived a dacoit, by name Talwar Khan, who was famed for the daring and originality of his raids. Where all others failed he was certain to find a way, and people began to whisper that he was in league with the Devil: "*Shaitan ka chela!*" they said.

This doughty fellow had set his heart upon robbing a certain wealthy old woman who, by virtue of her riches and the fact that she lived in the centre of a great city under the personal protection of the king, styled herself "Begum". Her house was always surrounded by guards—her own and the king's—and it was said that not even Talwar could crack that crib.

But Talwar Khan knew a trick worth two of any other. He sent his Fifth Columnwallas into the city—gay sparks they were, good mixers with plenty of money to spend and plenty of tales to tell. They made friends with the Begum's guards, gambled with them, lost money to them cheerfully, and regaled them with lots of good food and better wine.

Then, when Holi came round and fun and frolic were at their height, Talwar and his robbers slipped through the merry-making guards and seized the Begum. But, threaten her as they would, this iron-nerved old woman just wouldn't tell them where her wealth was hidden, and in the end they had to collect whatsoever they could readily lay hands on, and make off.

But Talwar Khan was as adamant as the Begum. He *would* get the money and jewels he had come for, so, forcing her into an old sari and dumping a bundle of her own stolen goods on her head, he made her accompany them.

Slipping out of a back door, they made their way down the main street, where the crowds were howling, dancing and ducking each other with coloured water. All the way the old Begum kept screeching, "Help! Help! Talwar Khan has me! The dacoits are taking me away!" And every time she yelled, Talwar's men roared with laughter, shouting, "Ho, ho, listen to her! But who's going to believe a mad hag!" What they said was: "*Arre, arre, sunna tho sai! Pagal buddhi ki bat kon manega!*"

Thus they escaped with their victim and plunder, and not till next day was the news of the crime noised abroad in the city, stunning the people with the simplicity and daring of the scheme. But there was one who was not stunned—the Begum's grand-daughter, famed amazon offspring of an Irish adventurer whose sword had carved out a kingdom for him in the north.

As adamant as her grand-mother, as daring as her father, she came galloping to the city, and from there, armed with sabre, shield and coat of mail, set out to rescue the old woman. Three days' ride from the city, on the outskirts of a big village, she was suddenly confronted by the robber chief and fell upon him with great impetuosity.

Now Talwar Khan had an unstinted admiration for this warrior maid, and had ordered his men not to interfere should a combat result at their meeting, for he believed he could easily subdue her.

But the fiery Irish spirit that would brook no defeat was too much for the stout-hearted Rohilla, and presently, bleeding and battered, the great Talwar Khan sank to his knees. His men rushed to his rescue, but he ordered them back sternly, saying: "No, in fair fight have I been defeated. My conqueror's will is now my law."

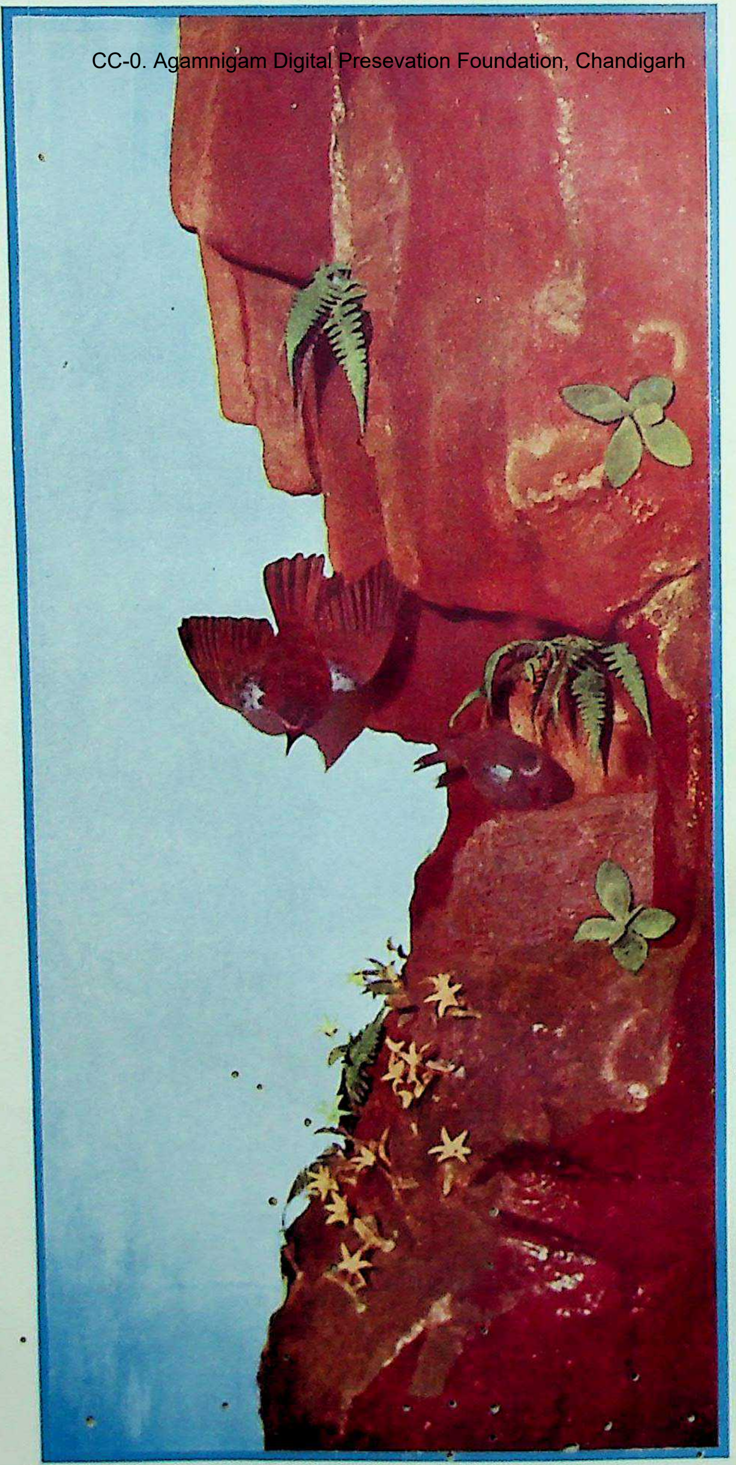
The girl ordered that she and her grand-mother, plus all the loot, should promptly be escorted back to the city, and no sooner had they entered its gates than Talwar Khan was pounced upon by the Kotwal, the Chief of Police, on whose head the abduction of the Begum had heaped more dirt than coals of fire. Wrists bound with chains, he was dragged before the king, and had been summarily sentenced to death, when the girl rushed into the Durbar Hall and demanded his release.

"I am not your subject, O King," she she cried, "I am an independent ruler, and this man is my captive. I demand his restoration to me."

The king merely laughed at her, and in a rage she whipped out her sabre. One stroke severed Talwar's chains, another decapitated a warrior who leaped at her. Talwar grabbed up the fallen man's sword, and back to back these two tried to cut their way out of the press. What carnage they created! Blood spouted everywhere as heads leaped away from shoulders, the Durbar Hall rang with the clash of sword on shield, and cursing men sank clawing at the slippery marble floor.

But the odds were too uneven. Fresh troops took the place of the fallen, and presently the doughty, red-headed girl and her companion were beaten down. With a roar of triumph the soldiers rushed in to finish them off—but their sabres struck only the blood-stained floor!

Above them, beyond their reach, sailed the twain, transformed by the admiring Sylvan gods into a Red-headed Merlin and her mate, doughty, swift marauders of field and hedgerow. And the brave girl's prowess is perpetuated in the fact that the female Merlin is bigger, stronger and more courageous than the male. The sabres they knew how to wield so well they still carry in the terrible talons with which they strike their prey.



IN COOL MOUNTAIN VALLEYS lives "The Idle Schoolboy," otherwise Myophonus horsfieldii, the Whistling Thrush of Malabar, which has a lovely voice but doesn't know how to make use of it.

The Whistling Thrush of Malabar

WHY CAN'T IT LEARN A TUNE?

If Malabar's Whistling Thrush, which has been endowed with an astonishingly rich and melodious voice, could learn to whistle a tune, it would be Birdland's prima donna "par excellence." But it can't and the reason why is outlined in this bird allegory.

One hot afternoon Krishna, leaving the Gopis to amuse themselves as best they might, wandered off along a mountain stream till he came to where a little waterfall, shot with rainbows by sunbeams slanting through the interlaced branches of trees above, cascaded in a fleecy column down the face of a dark rock.

It was a heavenly spot this, so cool, so inviting. Bees and song-birds filled it with a soothing lullaby; lively minnows flecked the pool at the foot of the waterfall with gold and silver; a Paradise Flycatcher, trailing its silver tail, undulated gracefully by; and a fat, yellow lizard, perched atop a dry boulder, kept nodding its fiery red head in continuous welcome, as though to say, "Come, tired wanderer, here is the Nook of Dreams."

Enchanted, Krishna threw himself down on a bed of moss and ferns, and presently the music of the woodland was hushed by the incomparably sweeter music from his flute. The birds clustered round to listen; a cobra slid from under a stone and stood swaying to the melody; the lizard ceased its bobbing; and even the shy four-horned deer stole silently along on their sharp, diminutive hooves to see who it was who played so beautifully.

A delicious languor stole over the master musician, and the flute slipped from his fingers as he fell into a deep sleep; but alas not a restful sleep, for his dreams were punctuated by an annoying whistling; a pertinacious, though very unsuccessful, effort to reproduce the first few bars of the tune he had just played. And mixed up with this was a still more annoying sound, a rhythmic thud, thud, thud, which at last awoke the divine one.

Sitting up, Krishna's eye alighted on an urchin who, his ragged garments stained purple and blue from the recent Holi festival, stood ankle deep in the pool, smacking a twisted cloth on a stone in an effort to wash it, the while he whistled incessantly. On another stone beside him lay the sacred flute!

A sudden fury filled Krishna. "Come here, boy," he shouted angrily. "How dare you steal my flute and disturb my sleep. Dost not know who I am?"

Approaching casually, the urchin dropped onto his haunches, and his eyes, as he looked at Krishna, were filled with mollifying hero worship.

"Had I not washed the cloth, master," he said, "my mother would have thrashed me. And I didn't steal the flute. Had I intended to do so, I should not have waited here till you woke up, should I? It was only my great love of music that prompted me to touch it. You will teach me to play, will you not? I will be your *chela* (disciple)."

Krishna's anger melted as swiftly as it had come, and he was filled with a great compassion. But, alas! he could do nothing, for it was inevitably decreed that anyone who touched the sacred property of the gods, whether knowingly or otherwise, should be cursed and suffer torture throughout the next ten thousand rebirths.

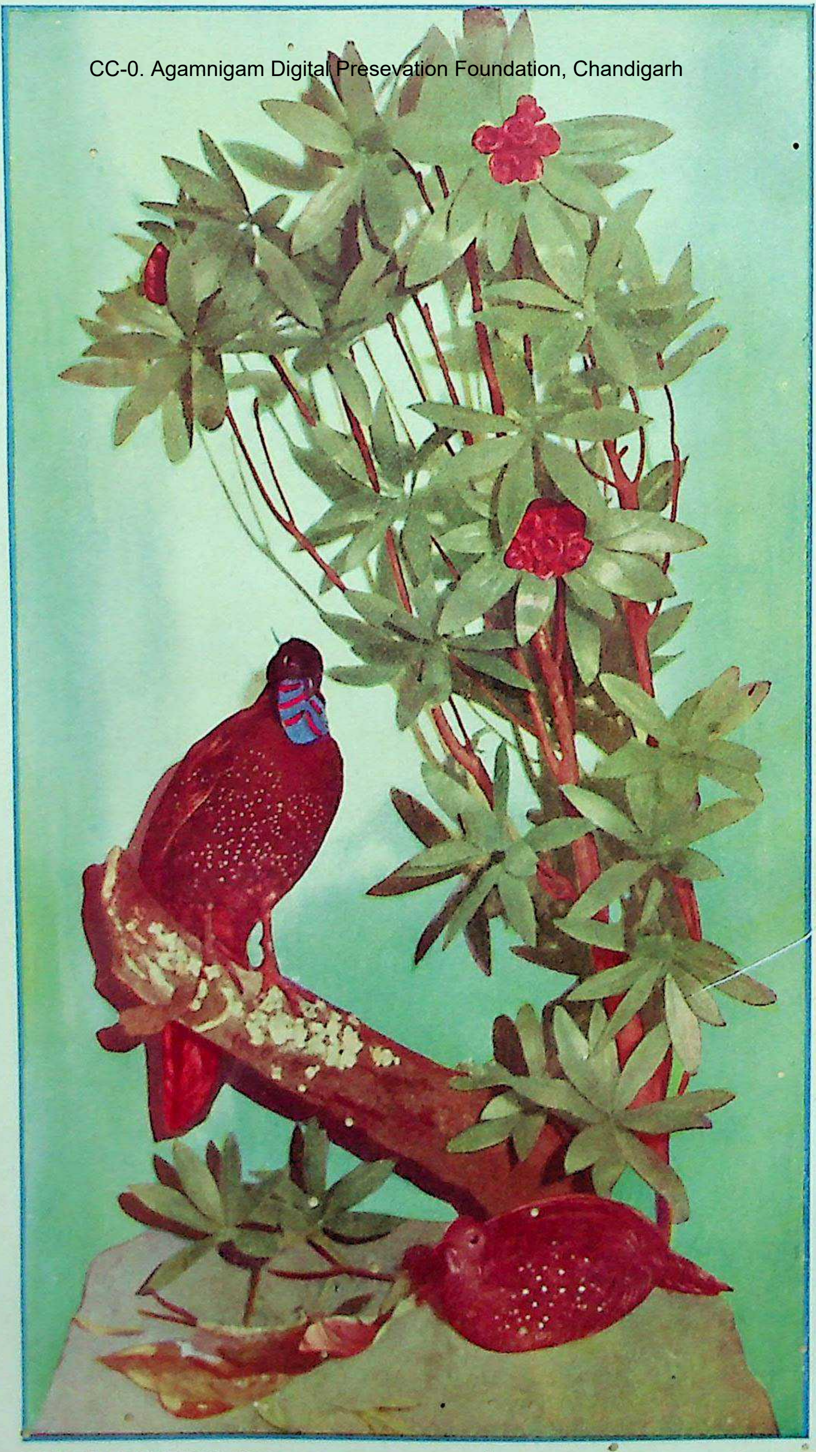
When this was explained to the boy, he fell on his face and wept bitterly, crying: "Had I known, I would not have sinned. Have mercy on me, master. Do with me as you will, but do not banish me from the beautiful valleys I love."

Swiftly in spirit Krishna communed with Brahma. Here was a genuine case of thoughtlessness, of ignorance. If the crime could not be forgiven, the sentence at least could be mitigated. Would the Creator permit even that much?

His prayer granted, he laid his hand on the urchin's mouth, saying, "For ever try to copy the tune of the gods, but never succeed." Then he touched his clothes, saying, "Let the raggedness and dust disappear and only the beautiful colours remain." Finally he laid his hands upon the boy's hands, saying, "As thou didst batter the cloth, so go on trying to batter thy sin away."

Immediately the boy was changed into the bird we know today as the Whistling Thrush of Malabar, with its dark purplish body and brilliant cobalt blue patches on head and wings. In this guise he still continues to live among the beautiful, flower spangled valleys of the hills, where he tries unsuccessfully to reproduce the tune that brought about his strange evolution.

As for the washing . . . . . well, you have but to watch the bird sitting on a rock and rhythmically hammering the hard shell of a snail to pieces to discover where that comes in. From this habit the name "Dhobi Bird" would not come amiss.



RUBY OF THE HIMALAYAS. A handsome, attractive bird of the snowline regions, the Crimson Tragopan (Tragopan satyra) and his mate are typical examples of Nature's scheme for the beautification of the male at the expense of the female. Actually this scheme, which has exceptions, contributes greatly towards the preservation of the species, the female on her nest being invisible to foes.

The Crimson Tragopan

SECRET OF ITS HORNS

High up among the spruce and rhododendrons of the Himalayas lives the handsome Crimson Tragopan, the splendour of his appearance enhanced by the feathery horns on his head. How he came by these is told in the allegory below.

Once upon a time there lived a princess, named Indira, who was so beautiful that even the rainbow of the skies and the peacock of earth faded into insignificance before her. But this was small consolation to her father, the Emperor of Hindustan, who would much rather have had a fine son to carry on his dynasty. Anyhow, he made the most of Fate's unalterable decree and declared that whomsoever the princess chose as her husband should reign as Emperor after him.

Suitors were not lacking. From every quarter of the empire came the kings and the great chiefs and their sons. From distant Persia and Assyria and the fabled lands of Egypt and Ethiopia on the one side, and from Burma, Thailand and China on the other, came splendid princes, bringing glittering entourages and rich presents, for the fame of the princess's beauty filled the whole earth.

But alas! it gradually dawned on the Emperor and the suitors that she was as wayward and as fickle in her choice as she was lovely. As the breezes of the heavens veer beyond man's control from this point to that, so did her choice veer from the first comer to the next and the next and so on, till the princes, their patience fretted, rose up in wrath and left the capital one by one. Greatly dismayed and sensing trouble, the Emperor tried to reason with his daughter, but she remained obdurate to his entreaties, and to his threats replied that if he tried to foist a husband on her she would kill herself.

So great was the dissatisfaction her behaviour had caused that the pot of rebellion was on the point of boiling over, when the country was electrified by the news that the princess was carrying on a clandestine flirtation with a young Captain of Horse in the Imperial Army.

A Gond of humble origin, his grand-sires had tilled the jungle lands for centuries and fought in the Gond army when occasion demanded. Fired by ambition, he had deserted the plough and harrow to seek adventure and fortune with sabre and shield; and so clever a leader of horse had he shown himself to be, that he had early attained some eminence and had been summoned to the capital in case the fiery undercurrent of indignation of the princess's generating should break out anywhere.

When the Emperor heard of the love-making, he flew into seven transports of rage, loudly demanding that the presumptuous young man be instantly dragged before the princess's chambers and slaughtered. But when the delighted executioners reached the camp, they found the victim and his followers had escaped.

To the forest-clad hills of his own people the Gond fled, and there set up his standard, declaring that he must now be considered, since the Emperor had put no limitation on the princess's choice, as Crown Prince elect. Then he put on the traditional Gond helmet, adorned with a pair of buffalo horns, and declared he would re-establish the Gond power which had been broken by the Emperor's grandfather.

His attractive personality, his growing fame as he won skirmish after skirmish with the Imperial troops, and the promise of advancement when he succeeded drew many adventurers to his standard, and soon he had a large and virile army, with which he fell upon and seized one of the rich provinces of the empire. Then, enthroned in state as an independent monarch, he sent messengers to the Emperor, demanding the hand of the princess and a place at the right of the throne.

"Go tell the dog," roared the Emperor, "that I shall impale him on his own buffalo horns!"

Fuming and fretting at the incompetence of his generals, he locked his troublesome daughter up in the strongest of his fortresses and set out with a great army to crush the rebellion. Rapidly the troops advanced, and one evening, as they spread out to camp beside the river Mahanaddi, the rebel and his lieutenants stood on a hill watching them.

"Alas!" cried one of them in dismay, "how shall we prevail against this force?"

But the Gond Captain only laughed. "Hast not heard that old calumny against us, friend," he said, "*Patta kharka, Gond sarka*—the Gond runs at the crackle of a leaf? Come, this is where we run away, and within a week the empire shall be ours."

Returning to his fortress, he ordered all his troops, bar 3,000 chosen men, to scatter to the four winds with his treasure, and on no account to reassemble or join battle without his orders. Then, making a hearty meal, he retired to rest. But before he fell asleep his old mother came to him, bringing with her the shy little Gond girl who had been his sweetheart in the village.

"My son," the old lady begged, "forget this fickle princess who has already caused enough trouble in the land. Take this girl of your own station and people. She will love and cherish you all her days and bear you strong sons. Forget these ambitious dreams, which lead more often to death and disaster than to success."

"'More often'," quoted the young man, "but *sometimes*, my mother, they lead to glory! Is not the princess like a comet of the heavens? And did she not choose me, a little star, to come up and shine beside her—to be, in fact, greater than her—to be Emperor of Hindustan!—Go thou in peace with my men and my treasure. Tomorrow I ride to my great destiny."

Taking no notice of the girl, he rolled over on his side and went to sleep, and three hours before dawn rode quietly off with his men. Giving the emperor's army a wide berth, he made a bee-line for the fortress in which the Princess was confined. The guards were taken completely by surprise. They tried to rally between the walls, but the attackers pressed their advantage with so much energy that by the afternoon the garrison was put to the sword and the Gond Captain rode proudly up to the princess's house.

She stood on a balcony, a slender, veiled figure, her delightful contours alluringly revealed by her silken draperies. With his blood pounding in his ears, the warrior approached and cried:

"Come, beloved, let us to our nuptials. Time and .... and .... well, time presses."

The girl drew aside her veil, and he was astounded to find that she was not the princess, only one of her hand-maids.

"While you were fighting at one gate, my mistress slipped out of another," she said. "She told me to tell you that she was going back to the capital to marry the handsome prince of Caucasia, who has come to woo her."

Mad with rage, blind with fury, the Captain wheeled his horse and galloped madly off in pursuit, determined to slay this faithless girl, but as he dashed over a low, grassy hillock, he found himself riding into a considerable body of the Imperial Cavalry that had come after him.

In a few minutes it was all over, and the warrior lay dead on the ground, his head cloven from the crown of his buffalo-horned helmet to his chin. Beside him, weeping bitter tears of remorse for the information she had given the enemy, crouched the unfortunate Gond girl he had scorned.

Brahma, the creator, looked down on them from Kailas, and at the bidding of Parvati, the wife of Shiva, changed them into the resplendent, horned crimson Tragopan, with his unimpressive, earth-coloured mate. And lest the Emperor, spotting the change, should cause the birds to be killed, he changed their habitat from Gondwana to the rhododendron-clad heights of the Himalayas. And there, remembering at mating-time his short-lived glory of the past, the Gond Captain of yore still makes his wonderful courtship display; for looking through the rose-fogged eyes of love, he sees his humble female at these times as the glittering Princess of Hindustan.

The Charlatan Sees His Chance

Aquilla Vindhiana ...... Kee-kee, the Tawny Eagle, to his friends ...... felt that life was not treating him fairly. From early in the morning he had been flying low over his favourite feeding grounds, quartering them systematically in his search of a meal. At first, thoughts of a luscious breakfast had filled his mind, then they had changed to thoughts of lunch, and now, as the sun, a crimson, clear-cut, glareless disc, hung behind the dust-screen at the edge of earth, those thoughts centred wearily in supper.

Hoping against hope that luck would not penalise him into going hungry to roost, Kee-kee wended his way towards a patch of low, dusty *ber* bushes where wild hare abounded. He had a splendid look-out perch there, on a branch of a dry tree, which rose, gaunt and grey, from the thorn; and barely had he settled on it than his keen eyes detected a suggestion of movement in the glade below.

A quick, searching scrutiny revealed the quarry as a baby hare, a small, fluffy, big-eyed thing, crouching with its long, pink-tinted ears laid flat along either side of its spine, and blending so exactly with the brown basalt boulders as to be all but invisible. Indeed, had it not been for the slight movement it had made in creeping in between a couple of the boulders, Kee-kee would have mistaken the hare for a stone.

He froze into intense immobility and decided to play a waiting game. He knew that the hare had seen him arrive and had sidled quietly to cover, but better still did he know how stupid hares are, and that if he waited long enough the baby would be beguiled into leaving the security of the stones. Then a swift, unerring pounce and ...... O ye sylvan gods! ...... what a meal!

But even as these pleasing thoughts and quick decisions flashed through his mind, Kee-kee awoke to the horrible realisation that he was not the only competitor for that little life. There was another, and one with the greater advantage of being on the ground and unseen by the quarry.

From the *ber* bushes had appeared a shape, a yellow, gliding, sinuous thing, pressed low to the ground and by imperceptible movement shortening the distance between itself and the hare. It was a yellow jungle cat, trusting for concealment in case of eventualities only to the matching of its tawniness with the sun-scorched grass around it, and to its ability to freeze at extremely short notice.

With a stealthiness and consummate artistry which even the deeply-chagrined Kee-kee could not help but applaud, for he was sufficiently skilled a hunter himself to be able to appreciate skill in others, the cat advanced.

Kee-kee felt powerless to intervene. He realised that the slightest movement on his part would send the hare scuttling for cover, and the chances were all in favour of the agile cat catching it before it reached that cover. That the cat would not give Kee-kee an opportunity for delivering an attack and wresting the prey was a certainty. Jungle cats are not fools!

But Kee-kee had one advantage. He suspected that the cat had not seen him, and he knew the value of surprise in attack. Tense and tingling with excitement, he waited and watched, the while the brilliant stalker gradually shortened the distance between itself and the quarry, and pounced.

The baby hare uttered just one, shrill, thin scream of surprise.....Mammy!..... and died.

The cat had scored a notable triumph, but that scream, that pitiful death-wail, was heard by the one to whom it had been addressed. Into the glade she burst, a bundle of galvanised fury, took quick stock of the situation, and attacked the cat. But for all its quickness there was nothing haphazard or baldheaded in that attack. It was calculated and delivered in deadly earnest.

Jinking aside with the speed of the brilliant meteorites Kee-kee had often seen gliding across the sky, the mother hare flashed around behind the cat and jumped clean over it. As she landed, she kicked back, sending a blinding, stinging jet of dust and gravel shooting into its face.

Around, over, kick. Around, over, kick. Again and again. And her movements were so quick that it was impossible for the watcher of this spectacular, posthumous rescue to tell whether any of the blows actually landed or not. But that the fury, method and total unexpectedness of the attack had all combined to disconcert the cat was plainly apparent.

Crouching and snarling viciously, it tried at first to frighten the furious hare away by the savagery of its voice and expression; and failing in this design it picked up the kill and tried to run away with it. But this the hare would not permit. She continued her leaping and buffeting, till eventually the cat in sheer desperation, dropped the kill and attacked her.

This way and that it sprang, lashing out with its claws, and a hundred times it seemed to Kee-kee that the bereaved and angry mother must pay the great penalty for her devotion. But great though the risk was that she ran, she was clever and agile enough to keep just out of reach of those terrible claws as she drew the cat further and further away from her baby.

In their combat Kee-kee saw his chance. On pins and needles with excitement, his empty crop urging him to hurry, he yet bided his time as only skilled hunters can; then, swift and true, he stooped. For a brief moment, as his wings over-spread the furry little carcase and his talons sank deep into it, he caught a glimpse of the cat racing towards him and the hare fleeing into the bushes. Then, with a shrill *kee-ee-ee* of triumph, he rose and whirled away with the reward of his patience.

The Prodigy's Courtship

THE STORY OF A MAGPIE ROBIN

From the day he pipped his shell in the hollow branch of a mangoe tree growing on the bund of a small tank, I watched him develop into a prodigy. It was in the Bilaspur District, and I was engaged on the construction of the Kharaung Reservoir, which would conserve the waters of the Kharaung river and bring prosperity to a large area. That project is completed now, and the old tank and its bund have vanished under a small blue sea, but the memory of Saul remains undimmed.

I called him Saul because he was a magpie robin, and learned men have christened his sect *Capsychus Saularis.* His neck was the longest of any in the nest, and his mouth spread widest, a dominating pink gape into which I dropped a juicy worm or grub when mamma wasn't looking.

He grew fast, marvellously fast. Soon he had outstripped his brothers and sisters, and as the nest was scarce big enough to hold him and them, they had perforce to crowd against the hard, unlined sides while he squatted comfortably in the middle.

When he emerged from the nest to battle with the world he was as big as his father. When he was a year old he was bigger than any other magpie robin in the vicinity, and his plumage was sleeker and glossier by far than that of other males in their full courtship regalia.

He was, indeed, a prodigy! Glossy black above, glossy white below, the white patches on his wings shewed up with startling clarity. He was bold too, above the average, for he early took to visiting us and fearlessly accepted the tit-bits we offered him, hopping near to collect them and flashing us black, lance-like glances of thanks from his bright eyes.

But the world in general did not appreciate him as much as we did, and soon set about drubbing him, lest he become swelled headed and be ruined. One morning, alighting on a branch above the pellucid Kharaung, he looked down and beheld one as magnificent as himself looking up at him. Quivering with indignation, Saul uttered an impudent challenge, which was flung back in his face with equal impudence. Surprised, he half lifted his wings. His adversary did the same. Angry, he drew himself up to his full, inconsiderable height and stamped about indignantly. His antagonist did the same.

This was too much for Saul. Straining every muscle, he made a wild dash at the impudent one, and struck the water with such force that a fountain of spray, five feet in height, rose up about him, and a stolid kingfisher, sitting on a near-by stump, uttered a harsh, rattling cacophony of mirth.

Poor Saul! Stunned, bewildered, his vanity fled and looking distinctly foolish and bedraggled, he extricated himself with difficulty from clinging strands of green slime and fled.

But he soon recovered his buoyancy and, as Spring was in the air and his thoughts turned naturally to love, etc., he took possession of a fine old mangoe tree and offered vigorous battle to all who sought to dispossess him of it. It had a wonderful nesting hollow half way up in a dry branch, and was ideally situated on a wooded slope. The Kharaung slid musically by between grassy banks near it, and around and about it were thickets of wild plum and *pallas*, which attracted insects galore.

In fact, so ideal a nesting site was it that both black-headed and common mynahs wanted it, and others of Saul's own folk were determined to have it. But Saul fought them all right valiantly for it, and for many days the air about it was filled with the shrill noises of bird strife and fluttering feathers. The mynahs and others were eventually defeated and went off to make the most of less-attractive nesting sites, leaving Saul to strut and chirrup victoriously about his own location.

But it was a lonely location, for as yet he had no wife. He envied the kingfisher his glossy, devoted little sweetheart with all his might; and almost strained his voice in attempting to out-do a red-winged bush lark which, hanging in the limpid blue above a meadow across the stream, poured down the magic of love's enchantment on a devoted partner. But he looked askance at the undignified dove, so vulgarly effusive and making such an unmitigated nuisance of himself to his reserved, Quaker-like spouse. He tried to keep her stuffed uncomfortably with food; he clung to the side of the untidy nest, trying to help her brood and almost crowding her off the eggs; he pestered her with attentions; and cooed his love song over and over again till all the neighbours were familiar with its trend and thoroughly fed up with it.

"Pah!" Saul determined, "I'll never wear my heart on my wing like that." Then one of his cousins appeared, a brown-backed Indian Robin, and for three days made violent love to the most exquisite little creature imaginable. She, shameless hussy, encouraged him brazenly, and as brazenly left him for another.

"Poor boob!" Saul sympathized, "you poor deluded goat! We're much in the same boat. Here am I, with the finest nesting site in Birdland, whistling myself hoarse for a wench that won't come. Dammit, I'll go fetch one. Cheeri-ho!"

Off he went, winging his way strongly down-stream, and stopping every now and then to fling a ringing challenge in the face of the morning. But no answering voice greeted him, till he came to a big pipal tree which overshadowed a little white temple. Here were Magpie Robins in plenty, and in amongst them suddenly dropped Saul's virulent challenge:

"Ho, fellows, behold me! The catch of the season! Ladies, to me."

The voices of the Magpie Robins were temporarily hushed, then pandemonium broke out. "Who is this braggart?" demanded the males. "How dare he flaunt himself before us thus!" The ladies were too dazzled to think, leave alone talk!

"Chip!" said one of them presently, a dainty creature perched on the temple wall, and advanced. But her husband dragged her back furiously.

Clear as a bell, loud, defiant, compelling, came the call again from the pipal tree: "Ladies, to me!"

Once more the bedazzled little creature fluttered forward, and Saul sprang into the air to meet her; but her husband was too quick for her. Cuffing her back and scattering some of her plumage, he rushed to meet Saul. Saul struck him like a flashing rocket, and then was red war waged around the peaceful little fane. Feathers flew and the air was full of anguished screams and excited chips and chatterings. The other male Magpie Robins, well-knowing the fickleness of the feminine heart, drove at the intruder in a bunch. Time and again Saul scattered them with furious rushes, but time and again they rallied and came at him, till eventually, odds of nine to one proving too much for even a prodigy, Saul decided that discretion was the better part of valour and "beat it" back to his mango tree.

But his sally had not been in vain. One charming little lady, wooed by many but as yet unwed, had fallen a victim to his spell and presently followed him. Up and down the stream she ranged, listening for his blithe carolling, but when she at last heard it and located him, her courage failed her.

"Chip, chip, chip," she screamed, affrighted, and fled.

But was she really affrighted? I hae ma doots!

Saul heard her and followed. Swift as light he darted after her. Around and around her he flashed his magnificent personality, and doggedly compelled her to change her course till, at last, he piloted her to the mango tree. There he displayed himself before her. He side-stepped and hopped. He drew himself up and stood on one leg and hopped. He fluffed and fluted and shewed himself off to her. And he sang, oh how he sang! Every passionate impulse of his strong body was thrown into his song. His music spilled about her like a shower of silver stars. It rose. It fell, In harsh, shrill, strident notes it told of his passionate longing for her. Softly, tenderly, it pleaded with her. It rose, clarion-like, to a dawn-flushed pinnacle of hope and triumph. It dropped into the dark depths of despair.

It was exceedingly entrancing, was Saul's courtship. It was one of the sweetest pieces of music I have ever heard.

And she? What did she think of it? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! She just sat there, on the mango tree, complacently preening her feathers!

"Dash it!" thought Saul as he paused for a breather and glanced at her, "what tough work this love making is! Let's try again."

Once more he sang, and I listened spellbound. He was hungry and badly needed some food, but love held him enslaved, subduing all other desires.

"Chip!" cried the lady suddenly, "no good!" and streaked off.

Saul was momentarily confounded, then, as the kingfisher's raucous rattle reached him, he saw red. Was *he* to be flouted thus? He, Saul . . . . Never!

In a trice he was after her and had caught her up. Furiously he attacked her, brought her down, buffetted her, rolled her in the dust and rumpled her daintily immaculate plumage. By the bucketful he handed out the cave-man stuff.

"Sure, you're on the right wicket now!" rattled the kingfisher.

"Coo-coo-agh-coo!" sighed the dove. "How would you like me to knock you about like that, m'dear?"

"Caw, caw," warned a drongo from his tall *simal* tree, the tallest in the neighbourhood, "don't get fighting about too close to me, old things."

Often she broke away from him, but finally Saul drove her back, rumpled and tired, to sleep in the mango tree.

Early next morning, when she pulled her head out from under her little wing and looked about, she found a fat grub placed on the branch in readiness for her *chota hazri*; and while she was eating it Saul appeared with another morsel for her. He was all attention now, full of solicitude for her welfare. She took the grub timidly from his beak, and while she was eating it he sang to her . . . . so sweetly that even the gitted bush-lark paused to listen. He conducted her to the stream and sat by and sang to her while she performed her toilet; and then he took and shewed her the pleasant little home in the mango tree . . . the home he had fought all-comers to keep for *her*: her particularly, he lied.

"Share it with me," he begged, and she agreed.

"Chip," she said softly, so very softly that he alone heard it. But her glance was still affrighted.

Cautiously he approached her with soft, seductive murmurings in his throat, and, wonder of wonders! she held out her beak for him to kiss. She was his!

Ecstatically Saul told it to the world.

His voice rang out clear and triumphant. She was *his*! He had found a mate whose equal was not.

"Aw, cheese it!" rattled the king-fisher, "we all think that . . . . at first!"

But Saul would not cheese it. He kept on telling the world about it. An insect, flying by, paused to listen. He flashed up into the air, caught it with a deft snap of his beak, and brought it to his sweetheart. They shared it. It was the plighting of their troth. Engagements are short in Birdland, though there is seldom any divorce! They became Mr. and Mrs. Saul.

She now took possession of the mango tree. It was her selection, she said, and he agreed with her, applauding her choice vociferously. Those were days of glamour. Domestic strife would be unknown yet awhile. Presently she placed the first twig in the hollow, and Saul, after examining it carefully, spent the rest of the day bringing others like it. She was a novice at nest building, so the structure was loose and rather ramshackle, but it had a solid foundation, and it was home. Their home!

A little later, when the first egg appeared, Saul sat on the edge of the hole and for a time became lost in admiration of it. Then he burst into song and sang the wife's praises and his version of "home sweet home." Hour after hour he sang, till presently even the persistent dove was moved to protest.

"Say, piebald," he cooed, "we know that blinking parody by heart now!"

But Saul cared a fig for him. He was married to a nice little wife and would soon be the father of a lusty family.

Let's hope that one of his sons was a prodigy too. I finished my job and left the place before the hatching.

The Intelligence of Crows

Corvus Splendens, the Crow.

Many of us are prepared to concede the suitability of *Corvus*. "But," we ask, and quite naturally too, "why the *splendens*? "For the crow is not one of the spectacular features of Birdland.

Possibly M. Viellot, the celebrated Frenchman who so named the bird, took into account its splendid mental qualities and powers of deep and accurate reasoning; for there can be no denying that Crows are the most intelligent of birds. Though their nests may not be works of art like those of some of their fellows, and though they lack beauty of voice and plumage, if it ever came to a real struggle for existence at the end of which only one species of bird would be left to us, I would bet my bottom dollar on that bird being the brainy Crow.

Instances of the Crow's cleverness are common. Most of us have seen, for example, the perfect partnership by which a dog is deprived of a bone; one bird waiting in front to grab it, while the other hops round behind and cunningly tweaks the dog's tail.

One very gusty afternoon I observed a party of crows, which had been foraging among the rubbish heaps, kitchens and the meat market of Kamptee, attempting to reach their rookery situated on the further bank of the Kanhan River. Time and again they hurled themselves into the teeth of the storm and laboured forward a few yards, only to be blown back. Presently they abandoned these futile tactics and met in council, to see if they could not save their wings by using their brains.

It was decided to try to rise above the storm, and at a signal, given by one bird during a lull, the whole lot rose and made a desperate effort to climb. They were beaten, however, and down they came, to meet in council again.

It was most interesting and astonishing to watch them. After a great deal of discussion, the crows eventually strung themselves out along the high, steep bank and waited grimly. Another lull came; once again the signal was given; like machine-gun fire it was cawed along the line, and the birds rose in a body and hurled themselves forward. For a moment they paused to steady themselves, then, tilting forward, drove steeply down towards the water, straightened out as they reached it, and crossed in the sheltered space between the banks where the force of the storm was negligible.

Under the opposite bank they changed formation into single file and flew along, just skimming the water, till they reached a point opposite their rookey. One by one they shot upwards, and so reached home and their waiting young ones....a feat they could not have accomplished under the stormy circumstances had they lacked reasoning power.

On another occasion, at Akaltara in the Bilaspur District, my wife and I saw crows displaying real wiliness. We were sitting on the verandah of the dak bungalow one morning, and saw a dozen or more crows come along and establish themselves on a tree by the roadside, where they proceeded to kill time by doing absolutely nothing. That they were there for some specific purpose we felt assured, and presently that purpose was made manifest.

A string of villagers appeared, carrying brimming baskets of rice on their heads, and several of the birds launched themselves at the baskets. What they actually did we could not clearly distinguish, but it seemed that they dived in and out very quickly, throwing up about themselves showers of rice grains, which were scattered along the roadway. Then they returned to their perches, and listened imperturbably to the volleys of abuse the villagers showered on them and their progenitors of many generations.

When the villagers had passed along, leaving behind them the scattered rice, the crows descended and fed leisurely; and when the next batch of villagers came, and the next and the next, the performance was repeated, the clever birds earning ample, and richly deserved, meals.

But the most astonishing chain of circumstances I have ever come across in connection with a crow occurred some years ago in the home of a friend of mine at Nagpur. His cook, a savage-tempered man, was plagued incessantly by a particular crow, which gave him no peace, robbed from him right royally, and skilfully avoided Sulaiman's efforts to trap it and my friend's efforts to shoot it.

But one day it met its Waterloo. Sulaiman surprised it in the kitchen, quickly closed the door, and prepared to get back a bit of his own. A desperate encounter ensued, the crow making frantic efforts to escape, and as a last resort attacking Sulaiman himself. But the cook eventually caught it and, in his frenzy, seized a sharp knife, sliced off half of its upper mandible, and flung it brutally out of the kitchen.

Normally, any bird so treated would have flown away instantly....and starved to death. That crow did not fly away. Maybe it was too stunned to do so, or it may have realised just what its end would be if it fled. With his gun ready to shoot it and put it out of its agony if it did attempt to fly away, and with bitter feelings in his heart against Sulaiman, my friend waited to see what the bird would do.

It fluttered about for a while, then hopped onto the kitchen drain, where it sat, the picture of dejection. It may then have been debating what to do next, for presently it hopped onto the kitchen verandah and took up a conspicuous position near the water chatti.

Sulaiman roared at it to be gone, and when it declined to go rushed at it with a knife. The crow turned its head on one side and looked up at him. Their eyes met. The miracle happened.

Sulaiman, muttering something about *bichara* (poor thing), stooped, picked up the bird and took it into the kitchen, where he washed the blood off it, dusted its injured mandible with saffron powder, and fed it on little pills of minced raw meat.

And that was the beginning of the most extraordinary friendship between man and beast it has ever been my lot to witness. They became absolutely inseparable, those two, and the crow learnt to respect Sulaiman's wishes. He could go off anywhere and leave the kitchen door open with impunity, for the crow would not allow a single soul, man, bird or beast, to enter while the cook was away. It attacked them with unprecedented fervour if they tried to.

And, more wonderful still, it even learnt to catch marauding rats and mice, which it carried out and dropped in front of the dogs or the cat, with all of whom it was on the best of terms....so long as they did not try to enter the kitchen! How it managed to hold the rats in its mutilated bill was a mystery to all of us.

Still more amazing were its powers of "hopping". Sulaiman would bring it out, seated on his wrist like a hawk, toss it up onto the kitchen roof, and then throw up meat or bread pills. It caught them deftly, and once it had attained proficiency, seldom missed or dropped one. I myself had a Muscovy duck that did this, but that duck had nothing wrong with its bill.

The great friendship between Sulaiman and the crow endured for four years, then Sulaiman died of cholera. My friend took the crow over and did all in his power to make it comfortable and to make friends with it, but it fretted for its companion and outlived the cook only three weeks.

The most probable explanation is, of course, that after its beak had been sliced off, the bird was too stunned to fly away, and that its move towards the dripping water pot was instinctive. Be that as it may, the developments were truly amazing. From the time its beak was cut, the crow uttered no vocal sound of any sort. In moments of stress it clapped its wings loudly.

A Rare Encounter

HAWK AND OWL IN DEATH STRUGLE

Behind the stop-butt on the Kamptee rifle range is a stretch of fairly open, grassy scrub jungle, where the seeker after small game may find an occasional quail, partridge, hare or even a wild pig. I went there one morning to see what luck might have in store for me, and got the subject matter for this story.

It was very early but bright enough to see, and as I was moving along circumspectly through the scrub, a big brown owl of some sort got up and began to flap away groggily, laboriously, but very silently, from me.

I was watching it idly when my attention was attracted by a sound....something like the *chwing* a telegraph wire makes when struck by a stone....and, on looking up, was astonished to see a hawk stooping at the owl. With its wings partly shut it was coming down at a slant with amazing velocity, and looking for all the world like a toy bird Santa Claus had thrown out from his bag as he journeyed across the sky.

When I first heard the hawk, the owl must have been about thirty paces away from me, flying dead straight along a horizontal course. Either it had not heard the hawk, or else it had heard it but was taking no notice of its approach.

What was the matter with the owl? Was it sick? Nothing was the matter with it! It was not sick. It had heard the hawk, and seen it too, possibly; but it had no white feathers to show.

I have never been so surprised in all my life as at what happened in the split second before the stooping hawk struck. It was not possible to make out exactly what did happen, the evolution being performed too quickly to enable the eye to follow its details; but it *seemed* as if the owl, without so much as the briefest pause in its flight, and without altering the horizontal position of its body, turned quickly over and met the hawk beak to beak and claw to claw.

The hawk screamed its surprise shrilly and shot out its wings to act, one supposes, as a break to its flight preparatory to changing direction, but it was too late; the combatants met with a dull thud, and with another dull thud hit the ground some twenty feet below, disappearing momentarily from my view.

I ran forward to see what was happening, but before I reached the spot the birds appeared again, locked together in what was to prove an embrace of death. The hawk, though much the smaller, was on top, labouring hard to carry the owl, whose great brown wings were thrashing it terribly. In silence, but for the thudding of the wings, they moved slowly away from me, swaying and reeling through the air amid a cloud of feathers. The hawk, despite tremendous handicaps, was slowly but surely lifting the owl.

For fifty yards they staggered along, fighting furiously, then the fight reached its frenzied climax. The beating of the brown wings momentarily redoubled; the hawk screamed shrilly once; then, turning over and over, they thudded to the ground again.

When I reached them, they were still locked together in that embrace of death. The hawk was dead. It was lying spread-eagled on top of the owl, its talons buried deep in the flesh, well forward on either side of the breast bone. Its neck was almost bitten through, and its crop and breast were torn to shreds.

The owl was lying spread-eagled too, but on its back. It was alive, but it shuddered and died a few seconds after I reached it. The talons of one foot were buried deep in the hawk's abdomen; the other leg was missing. It had been torn away bodily, and as the blood around the wound was nearly dry, it must have been lost in some other encounter during the night, probably with a wild cat or a bandicoot. This, I suppose, accounted for the owl's slow and groggy flight, and for the furious temper it must have been in to make it attack the hawk.

Its body was laid open by a fresh, deep gash. On turning it over I found that its back and the base of its neck were terribly bitten and torn. It appeared from the wounds that the owl had got its head well in under the hawk first, and all the hawk could do was to stoop over and tear at its back. I searched carefully, but there was not a mark of any kind on the owl's head.

Did the hawk know what it was attacking, or did it mistake the owl for some other bird? Maybe it was deluded by seeing the owl abroad in daylight, or else it knew what it was attacking, and went through with it because of a hard-pressed family at home, or through being hard pressed itself for food.

Whatever may have been the reason, the battle was one of the finest illustrations I have ever had of "Nature in the Raw."

The Marriage Feast

A TAWNY EAGLE'S CLEVER TRICK

Resplendent in all the glory of his youth and courting plumage, Kee-kee, better known to staid naturalists as *Aquila Vindhiana*, the Tawny Eagle, sat on the topmost branch of a leafless Bombax and surveyed the world. But for the moment the warm mellowness of the sunshine, the intoxicating scent of the first mango blossoms, the monotonous tonk-tonk of the last coppersmiths, and the insolent nearness of *Milvus Migrans Govinda*, the hated Common Kite, meant nothing to him.

In Kee-kee's blood there was this morning a strange, disturbing throb, and through his mind ran riotously a new fancy, to which he could not give a name. All that he knew was that he wanted something, and wanted it badly. But just what that something was—that something that every fibre of his vibrant being urged him to go and find—he had not the faintest idea. For Kee-kee was still young and inexperienced in the more complicated problems of life.

So he remained sitting on his lofty perch, thrilling to these very novel and pleasing sensations, the while he tried to puzzle out their meaning. Not for long, however, was he left in ignorance. Far away against the blue of the cloudless heavens his keen eyes detected two tiny specks wheeling, diving, rising again in ecstatic flight, and he recognised them as a pair of his own kind, a big, powerful-looking young male much like himself, and a sleek, beautiful specimen of the opposite sex.

At sight of her Kee-kee knew instinctively what it was that he was wanting so badly—love, passion, companionship, a nest high up in the forked branches of a tall tree, eggs, babies, all the really big things in life. A flame shot through him, galvanising him into action, and with a shrill challenge he launched himself into the air and drove powerfully towards the animated temple of delight.

> *" Come ye in peace here, or come ye in war,*
> *Or to dance at our bridal, young Lord Lochinvar? "*

The bride's companion saw Kee-kee coming and made no mistake as to the reason of the visit. No dangler of bonnet and plume, he knew that the only goblet the bridegroom would drain this day would be a shattered carcase from which the life-blood flowed. Well did he know, too, that no word in this bride's ear, no touch on her claw, would induce her to flee with him. Coquette-like, as primitive in these matters today as when the world began, she would wait and watch, glorying in the fires which she had lighted; and later on she would honour the victor.

Kee-kee's rival wheeled into position, measured the distance, and attacked; and then was fought an epic aerial battle which put to shame the clumsy efforts of puny man in his giant mechanical contrivances. Around and around, over and under each other the combatants whirled at bewildering speed, slipping, sliding, diving, rising, watching and seizing every opportunity to send the the feathers flying from each other in little tufts or greater clouds. Powerful wing smote powerful wing in an effort to fracture bones, beak and talon sliced and slashed devastatingly; blood dripped on to the earth far below; eyes glazed and muscles ached with fatigue; but still they fought on, implacable, indomitable, determined to conquer, determined to kill. (Thus in the bygone did hirsute man assault his brother with a club, while Eve, radiant in fig leaf and orchids, looked on.)

And Kee-kee won. Seeing a brief opening, he seized it. Diving bullet-like with his wings shut tight, he struck with a stunning thud. In a trice his long, sharp talons were buried deep in his adversary's back, his hooked beak had seized his adversary's neck, followed a sharp twisting wrench and....the fight was over.

Three or four quick somersaults the dead and the living cut as, sealed together by the grip of death, they hurtled earth-wards, then Kee-kee, thrilling with victory, spread his broad wings, released the inanimate, fluttering carcase he held, and went to his reward. High above him she circled, and he rose to greet her; for a while they wheeled and curtesied in ecstatic flight, then by common consent, unexpressed but signalled, they planed down to earth and settled on a tree.

"My dear," she whispered as she nestled close against him, "you're marvellous! Splendid!"

"You too," he replied as he looked fondly at her and caressed her with his beak. "You bewilder me. Even if our big cousin, *Aquila Chrysoetos*, the Golden Eagle, came along now, I'd fight him for you."

"Would you really!" Ecstacy seized her and she hung her head modestly.

Presently, by a natural sequence, their thoughts returned from realms ethereal to those mundane, and Kee-kee expressed them. "My dear," said he, "the day is already far spent and we have yet to find and kill our wedding feast."

"Let's go to the Jajpur warren," she suggested.

"The Jajpur warren!" He was surprised. "There's nothing there for us eagles. Old Khar-gosh, the King of the Hares, has taught his progeny all the tricks of the trade, and they simply can't be trapped."

"Can't they though!" she exclaimed mischievously. "I have a little trick tucked away in my wing coverts that's worth two of any that Khar-gosh invented. It will give us our marriage feast, and many another feast as well. Come along, we'll dine tonight off old Khar-gosh himself. You're strong and splendid in battle, dear," she added as they flew along, "but you have no guile in you. This is my scheme. Listen carefully and don't make any mistakes."

They reached the extensive patch of low thorn and baro bushes, and Kee-kee settled on the ground at its edge, while his clever bride hid herself some distance away amongst the broad, thick leaves of a gnarled *dak* growing at the edge of a small clearing. When she, strong and fresh for the stoop of death, was in position, Kee-kee selected a narrow rabbit run and started to walk slowly along it towards the tree.

Instantly the silent bushes became alive with subdued sound. Thump-thump-thump. Silence. Thump-thump-thump. Silence. Thump-thump-thump......thump-thump......thump. The bunny telegraph was working fast and furiously, and soon the whole warren knew that a stupid eagle was walking about in the garden.

Big eyes peeped from hidden vantages at Kee-kee as he waddled nonchalantly, along, a ludicrous sight, for he was quite unaccustomed to walking. Grey furry forms flashed across the path in front of him and vanished. All around was a lightly rustled stirring in the electrical atmosphere of the bush, then Khar-gosh, the big, fat powerful king of the warren, he who had more wives than Solomon, Henry VIII and Shah Jehan put together, hopped deliberately out on to the path some distance ahead of Kee-kee and sat up on his haunches to subject the ungainly intruder to a close scrutiny.

Kee-kee, quite indifferent to the Imperial Presence, and not troubling to change his gait, speed or owl's expression, waddled on. With a loud burst of derisive laughter, which was echoed diplomatically from the bush, Khar-gosh dropped on to all fours, lolloped a little further on down the path, and sat up to have another look. His expression expressed disdain, but in his eyes fear and curiosity mingled, as though he suspected some cunning ruse afoot and could not for the life of him fathom it.

Once more, as Kee-kee approached, he dropped on to all fours and lolloped off down the path, but as he reached the edge of the fatal clearing the assassin hidden in the tree dropped on him like a stone, the setting sun lighting her up like a red messenger of death, and buried her beak and talons in his back.

Grunting, maddened with rage and despair, Khar-gosh put up a great fight. High into the air he leaped and tried to shake his would-be murderer off, but failed. Gathering himself together, he tried to rush into the bush, but powerful wings, fanning backwards, nullified the effort. Then Kee-kee joined his bride, and together they quickly made an end of Khar-gosh's struggles.

Over his fat carcase their beaks met in a long, pre-prandial eagle kiss, then they fell to and had a really regal marriage feast, richly deserved.

Speed!

A MONGOOSE–COBRA FIGHT

The short winter's day was drawing to its close; the shafts of sunlight had turned from gold to rose; from the luscious rice fields, just changing from their pristine green to the yellow of dawning maturity, cock patridges arrayed in all the glory of their courting plumage boldly challenged each other to mortal combat; the crows and minahs, abandoning their foraging, wended their way in companies to their roosting places.

At this time the thoughts of two implacable enemies turned to the evening meal. Nag, the black cobra who lived in the cactus, uncoiled himself and glided sinuosly towards the marsh where frogs abounded; and Neola, the big mongoose, grey, lowly, keen of eye and nose, came through the cactus cautiously, searching for Nag.

In a glade flushed with the roseate glory of sunset they came face to face and stopped, not ten feet from each other.

Nag did not need to be told why Neola was there; nor did he need to be told what a superb fighter this big, experienced mongoose was. But Nag was a fighter too, just as skilled and just as experienced. He could move with the speed of light; he could strike with an accuracy far greater than that of Shahin, the dread falcon; and the sacks at the back of his long, sharp fangs were full-charged with death-dealing venom.

It was to be, he realised, a battle of champions, a contest inexorable, from which there could be no turning back, and to which there would be but one ending...... death for one, dinner for the other. The preliminaries were over in a flash. Hissing his defiance and darting his slender, forked tongue, Nag raised thirty of his seventy-two inches of sinuous blackness off the ground and spread his broad, spectacled hood. Neola bushed his tail, and made the hair along his spine stand up.

At this moment both combatants became aware of the arrival of spectators. A minah and a jungle crow, a black, raven-like thing, while flying over the glade on their homeward way, saw the stage set for the homeric combat and at once abandoned all thoughts of roosting.

Down they came to settle on the cactus, one on either side of the glade, and loudly did they advertise the stirring scene.

Nag stood on the defensive, swaying slowly from side to side and trying to draw Neola's eyes to his own, so as to mesmerise him. But Neola knew well the power of those glassy, unwinking orbs and refused to meet them.

With his own gaze fixed at a point just below Nag's hood, he opened the attack. Moving forward quickly till he was just within Nag's reach, he made a feint to one side, and immediately Nag struck. Down came that great hood with a speed so bewildering that it seemed nothing could save Neola.

But Neola saved himself. Jumping lithely a little to one side, he darted in with a speed even greater than that of Nag, bit him with precision on the back, and in a trice was away again, out of the big snake's reach.

At the moment that Nag struck, the crow and the minah hurled themselves at him, only to collide heavily with each other in midair above him. Shrieking imprecations at each other, they returned hurriedly to their respective perches, and the scene resumed its former setting, except that Neola's sharp, pink nose twitched with excitement and two drops of blood glistened on Nag's back.

The second round was an exact replica of the first. Again Nag, with the light rippling down him, struck and failed; again Neola gave that quick, characteristic little spring aside, then jumped in and bit; again the birds dived and bumped into each other, their clownish tactics adding comedy to an intensely dramatic scene. Four drops of blood stood out on Nag's back.

For a space, while the crow and the minah exchanged uncomplimentary remarks with great heat, the principal combatants paused, then Neola moved forward again to open round No. 3. In principle it was akin to the rounds that had gone before, but it had a dramatic variation. Again both the birds dived at Nag, but this time they missed each other and missed their mark as well. The minah fled on and returned to its perch by a circuitous course, but the crow tried pull up in mid-air above the snake and turn back. In this endeavour it was entirely successful, but a trifle *late!*

Nag whipped up and back, and struck with fearful force, his blunt snout thudding against the crow's ribs with the impact of a steam hammer. The unfortunate bird, stunned by the angry blow, was flung fully fifteen feet across the glade, where for a moment it lay motionless. Presently it began to flutter and throw itself about violently, the while the minah circled and screamed above it. Gradually the contortions became less violent, and presently the unhappy spectator lay still in death. The minah returned to its perch, and when the combatants closed again, *it did not venture to join in the attack.*

In the sudden brilliance of the brief Indian twilight Neola finished the fight to his advantage. Walking fearlessly up to Nag, he raised himself on his short legs till quivering pink nose and black, blunt snout were almost touching. Came a lightning snap and he had the big snake by the snout. Nag writhed terribly in his death agony, coiling himself about the mongoose trying to crush his ribs, but without avail.

Neola, calm, collected, shewing no signs of excitement or strain, hung on grimly and waited, and when Nag had ceased to struggle, smelt along the quivering length, then, seizing it just behind the hood, dragged it laboriously into the cactus.

The minah dropped very circumspectly to the ground, hopped along, peered curiously into the cactus, then, with a skirl of congratulation, rose and flew away, leaving the dead crow to whoever mighty be lucky enough to find him first.

Bright Eyes

THE JUNGLE IS ALWAYS WATCHING

Murghi, the little brown hen, with her glossy blue-black tail sticking up jauntily like a fan, came tripping through the scrub, cocking a bright eye now at this tree now at that in search of a place of shelter. Presently she flew up on to the branch of an evergreen, to where the leaves of a creeper made a dense, promising canopy.

She fell to preening her sleek feathers, combing through them energetically with her beak, oiling them from the ever-obliging fount at the root of her tail. But her energy soon flagged, her wings drooped, her beak fell open, and she too, like the palpitating jungle about her, fell into a panting, restless semi-somnolence.

A dozen times she shut her eyes, only to snap them open again as some sound disturbed her; and the climax came when a bunch of Seven Sisters, colourless, sad-faced, disgruntled, eternally grumbling, came hopping along, listlessly turning over the dry leaves in their eternal search for something that seemed to elude them always.

To their din was presently added the sharp krrrrrr of Murgha, the Cock, warning his scattered harem to look lively, and Murghi, cocking her eye upwards, saw a vulture sailing slowly along over the treetops. Apostrophising Murgha's warning as merely alarmist, she tried to settle down again to the hopeless task of comforting herself in the heat. But to her external troubles was now added a strange inward stirring, as wholly inexplicable as it was novel. In vain she tried to plumb the cause of it, but she could only discover that it had begun when that warning call had ascended to her from the surrounding bushes.

Lost in puzzled contemplation of the mystery, Murghi scarcely heeded the hours as they slipped by. The burning sun crossed the zenith and started sinking towards the West, the shadows of tree and bush began to lengthen slowly, the breezes to stir with a welcome caress; but the little hen sat on, absorbed in her thoughts, till she was suddenly galvanised into action by another sound...the persistent kurr-chhhuk-chhhuk-chhhuk, kurr-chhhuck-chhhuk-chhhuk of the cock calling his ladies to a royal feast.

Up went her drooping wings, snap shut her open beak, and down she dropped from her branch, to go scurrying in acceptance of the invitation. For Murghi knew Murgha well. "First come, first served" was his motto, so she legged her fastest and was fortunate to reach him ahead of others as, for the umpteenth time, he picked up and dropped his rich discovery; a fat grub.

Murghi swallowed it at a gulp, and Murgha, his eyes shining with a new fondness, drooped a wing stiffly to the ground, and scraped it musically with his spur....at least it was music to her ears now that she had discovered in a flash what that strange stirring was....and did a little love dance around her. Then, suddenly arching his neck and throwing forward the shield of brilliant feathers he wore on it, he grabbed her by her comb and unceremoniously further clarified that mystery for her.

From thenceforth the days were changed for Murghi, for to the necessity of searching for her food was added the urge to build a nest; and in the middle of each day, with her crop comfortably full from the morning's foraging, she would set out to investigate first this place and then that. Although she had never built a nest before, she knew just what sort of place it was that she wanted....a spot where the possibility of being alarmed or disturbed in her brooding would be reduced to a minimum ....and when eventually she found a boulder on a hillside, with dry leaves lying thick about it, she knew that her search was ended.

Under a projection of the stone she scratched a shallow, saucer-like depression in the hard ground, lined it thinly with soft grasses and feathers from her own body, and there eventually she laid seven eggs.

For three weeks she would have to incubate those eggs....three weeks during which, stripped of her betraying scent by kindly mother Nature, her colour blending into invisibility with the surrounding terrain as she sat close, she would have to go and come from that nest with the greatest caution, lest her movements betray herself and her treasure to the bright eyes of the jungle, which always watched and waited, ready for the pounce or foray of destruction.

But, careful though she was, poor little Murghi was not to know that one afternoon other eyes, as vigilant and as bright as her own, watched her returning cautiously to her nest. They were black, beady little eyes those, which stared from behind the twitching white whiskers adorning a thin, sensitive nose with quivering nostrils....the eyes of Chuha, the jungle rat.

Chuha and Chuhee his wife had their home in a hole further up the hillside, and now that their family had developed from just mere rolls of wriggling pink flesh into grey squeakers with big heads, bigger eyes and absolutely insatiable appetites, the parents found it extremely difficult to keep the larder full. So, when Chuha spied Murghi stepping cautiously along to her nest, his heart gave a great thump of joy.

"Look, my dear," he squeaked excitedly to his wife, "the Banquet Royal awaits us. Tomorrow we'll start on it."

"Why not start on it now?" she retorted. "I've spent the best part of the day foraging for those brats of yours, and they're still hungry. Just listen to them. Whatever *am* I to do?"

It was her first family, as she was Chuha's first wife, and he glanced at her now in mingled astonishment and dismay. Where was the docility of yesterday? What on earth had come over her?

"Have you gone mad?" he raged at her. "Don't you know what would happen if I went after the eggs while that....that bird....

"Oh, I know," said Chuhee as she turned back to her wailing family. "You'd.... you'd get some *exercise*. A little taste of that blitzkrieg we heard the Forest Officers talking about yesterday."

Rattled, Chuha sat on at the mouth of his burrow watching Murghi. And the longer he watched her the more did he lick his lips in anticipation of the feast on the morrow. Night fell, shutting out the pleasant view, but the anticipation remained as the big rat set out on his wanderings in search of food and water. He got neither, for so wrapped up was he in his thoughts that a big owl nearly got him, and he had to scuttle back to his hole, where he lay trembling through that horrid night, while the owl waited patiently for him to venture forth again.

But, compelled though he was to sit and listen to the grumblings of his wife and family, Chuha was still stirred by force of habit, and at daybreak he sat up and performed a meticulous toilet, licking his pink paws, face, body and whiskers shiny clean before crawling up to the mouth of the hole to watch Murghi leave the nest. But here again disappointment assailed him, for the wretched bird sat tight all that day and the next as well, while Chuha fretted his soul in dreadful impatience.

But she had to go eventually, and when she sneaked off the rat lost no time in making his raid, though this time him movements were tempered with due caution. Slipping quietly out of his hole, he slithered along among the leaves, but as Murghi once before, so he himself now was not to know that his movements were being watched with great interest.

Neola, the mongoose, and his wife were scouting quietly about, a pair of grey ghosts in khaki surroundings. They were hungry too, and the promise of monsoon plenty in the air had yet to materialise. But since eggs figured largely on their diverse menu as well, they had come to this leaf-carpeted hillside where hens would be nesting.

And now, as he lay atop a stone, frozen into sudden immobility by Chuha's suspicious movements, Neola signalled his wife with his bushy tail to come up and see the circus. Together they watched the rat sneaking along, darting suspicious glances here and there, stopping every now and then to sniff the news, telling them in a story without words that he was creeping to a new food cache that he wanted to keep very, very secret. They saw him vanish around a boulder, from behind which he presently re-appeared, struggling to roll an egg uphill towards his burrow.

Mrs. Neola thrilled with excitement. Looking at her splendid mate lying absolutely immobile beside her, "Let's go and get it!" she whispered urgently.

But she was Neola's third wife....the first was now doing duty with a snake-charmer somewhere, the second had failed to rejoin him after an abortive raid on a villager's poultry....and he kept her sleek, inexperienced little self in check.

"Wait," he said, twitching his nostrils, "we'll have some comic cuts as a breakfast appetiser....a little jungle cabaret to amuse us. I know these rats and their ways."

Chuha struggled valiantly on, pushing the egg now with his paws, now with his nose. But the ground was rough and the brutal thing just wouldn't go straight, till, perspiring and profane, he decided he must have help, and went to call Chuhee.

"Well," she scolded him as he appeared again empty-pawed before her, "so you haven't brought it! I might have known you wouldn't, you......you lazy good-for-nothing!"

"Good-for-nothing yourself!" Chuha retorted briskly. "Because I elevated you from the stinking plains and brought you up here to share my mountain home, you seem to have gone dizzy with conceit. Come and help me now, or I'll jolly well eat the egg and leave you to forage single-handed for the family."

Suitably impressed by this Petruchio-like outburst, Chuhee meekly followed her mate, the while he told her he would show her a really cunning dodge his parents had taught him on this very hillside. When they reached the egg, Chuha took it firmly between his forepaws and rolled over onto his back.

"See," he said, "that's all you have to do. Just hang on to it tight while I take you by the tail and lug the whole caboodle home. Get me?"

"Yes, I get you," returned Chuhee as he gazed hopefully at her over the edge of the egg, "but you don't get me doing anything like that! Why, I'd have no hair left on my back! You hold the egg. *I'll* do the pulling." And without more ado she grabbed Chuha's tail and began to drag him along.

But the hill was steep, the sun was hot, and Chuha was passing heavy, so presently she was forced to capitulate and suffer the indignity of being hauled home, the supine bearer of their breakfast.

Absorbed in their venture, the rats were making a good deal of noise, but for which they might have heard the subdued approach of the Neolas. All the greater, then, was Chuha's surprise when these two most unwelcome visitors suddenly bobbed up from behind a stone; and after a moment of paralysis, he fled squealing up the hill, abandoning poor Chuhee to her fate.

Startled, but still clinging faithfully to the egg, Chuhee rolled over onto her stomach, and when she looked into those menacing eyes and twitching nostrils, she hurled herself into the air and fled madly down the hill, back....back to those stinking plains she knew so well. The family could go bust. She had but one life, and she could get other husbands and other babies.

From behind a root high up on the hillside Chuha, with heaving flanks and impotent rage consuming him, watched the happy Neolas fall to with zest. But just as he, a short while ago, had not noticed their approach, so now they, pleasantly absorbed, did not notice what he noticed....a villager, with a little bright axe and a net bag in his hands, creeping along.

He too was searching for eggs, and when he saw the mongooses busy eating one, he stood still to watch them, his eyes roving around in search of the nest. Chuha hoped he would attack the grey ghosts and drive them away; instead, he sat down quietly and watched them, and Chuha began to sweat with anxiety. If, when the Neolas finished their breakfast, they searched for and found the nest, this brute of a man would surely get the eggs.

But the breeze told the Neolas a little story, and they faded away as silently as they had come, leaving the man to do his own searching, in which, happily, he failed. Chuha's hopes revived, and when the coast was clear he was just about setting out on his quest again, but saw Murghi returning.

Cursed by the rat, the little hen, oblivious of what had happened, settled herself on the nest, while he settled down to wait for her to leave it again, determined that this time there would be no mistake. But though, his matrimonial tranquillity re-established by the return of Chuhee, he bided in patience, that patience was not rewarded.

For when Murghi did leave her nest three days later, she left only shells behind. Six fluffy little chicks toddled along in her wake.

A Drama of the Wilds

After a long and dusty trek in the month of April, I arrived one afternoon at the Gangajheri railway station and settled down to a long and dreary wait for a passenger train to take me to Gondia.

Waiting for a train is always an uninteresting business, and as I had nothing to read and nothing particular to do, I lay back in the obliging station-master's rickety long-chair and prepared to doze the waiting hours away. Barely had I "fallen off," however, when I was jerked awake by the sound of two cock partridges challenging each other to mortal combat.

Rising happily, I made my way to a patch of scrub just behind the station, and on reaching it found that battle had already been joined. The combatants were going at each other hammer and tongs, and walking round and around them, cool, calm, composed, deeply interested and, I daresay, feeling highly flattered too, was She for whom they were so earnestly knocking tufts off each other.

I had not previously seen cock partridges fighting it out in their native haunts, so, creeping up as close as possible to them, I froze stiff and watched the fun.

It was worth taking far more trouble than I had taken to see that fight. Beak to beak the contestants stood, in slightly crouched attitudes, watching each other intently. The feathers on their stiffened, out-thrust necks were ruffed to form shields; and in order that those little shields should hide as much as possible, the birds had, it seemed, compressed their bodies, especially their hindquarters and tails, into the smallest possible compass.

They did not slide their heads up and down quite so frequently as cocks do, nor did they attempt those vicious jabs which cocks give each other after each clash. Suddenly their bodies would rise together, and feathers, in puffs, tufts and clouds, would fly as they met in mid-air and kicked and spurred in desperate attempts to disable each other.

It was a miniature cock-fight, but it was far more spectacular than any cock-fight I had ever seen.

The clashes occurred at noticeably longer intervals, and after ten minutes or so both the contestants were so tired that the most they could do was to move drunkenly forward and butt heads harmlessly. I think, had the lady not been there to remind them of the handsome reward awaiting the victor, they would both gladly have abandoned the contest in favour of having a prolonged breather.

But she was there, and She was She, so, I suppose, unsophisticated and virginal to their enamoured eyes as to be doubly alluring, that they fought on ludicrously long after their pristine valiance and energy had deserted them. Every now and then one would pull himself together and bump the other resoundingly; and presently it became apparent to me that the one I had named Dick was doing this rather more frequently than Sam.

After ten minutes of brisk battling and twelve minutes of inebriated wallowing in the sweat of fatigue, Sam decided that he had had enough for the present. Turning tail, he started grogging slowly away in a decidedly wibbly-wabbly fashion, with Dick coming on behind and giving him valedictory kicks and pecks to keep him going.

When he had seen Sam "off the grass", so to speak, Dick returned to where he had left Her and claimed his reward. But she, having decided with true feminine perversity that the vanquished had more need of sympathy and solace than the victor had of reward, went off after Sam, and nothing that Dick could do would persuade her to change her mind.

Hopelessly fed up, spent, and utterly bewildered by this unreasonable withdrawal of the favours for which he had battled so well and victoriously, Dick returned from following Her and hopped on to a log, where he sat dejectedly, forgetting even to shrill his triumph to the world.

Pitying the poor fellow and abusing the universal unjustness of Eve, I had barely turned away to return to the railway station, when I heard a flutter and a squawk. Turning swiftly, I saw that Dick was no longer perched on the log. As dead as the proverbial door nail, he was being borne away by a highly elated mongoose.

Poor devil! In his dejection he had been off his guard for a few brief moments ....with fatal consequences to him.

Omar's Pen in Birdland

Look first at the Hoopoe, next at the Roller, commonly miscalled the Blue Jay, note what a striking difference there is between them now, then pause for a while to marvel at the fact that these two birds were once brothers, and, of course, sisters, too.

Science will dispute that statement hotly, though to the man-in-the-street the gulf is not so wide, considering that all men in their prehistoric simian state were brothers, though now there is a world of difference between the dweller in the Land of the Midnight Sun and the Gonds of Ind's sunny jungles.

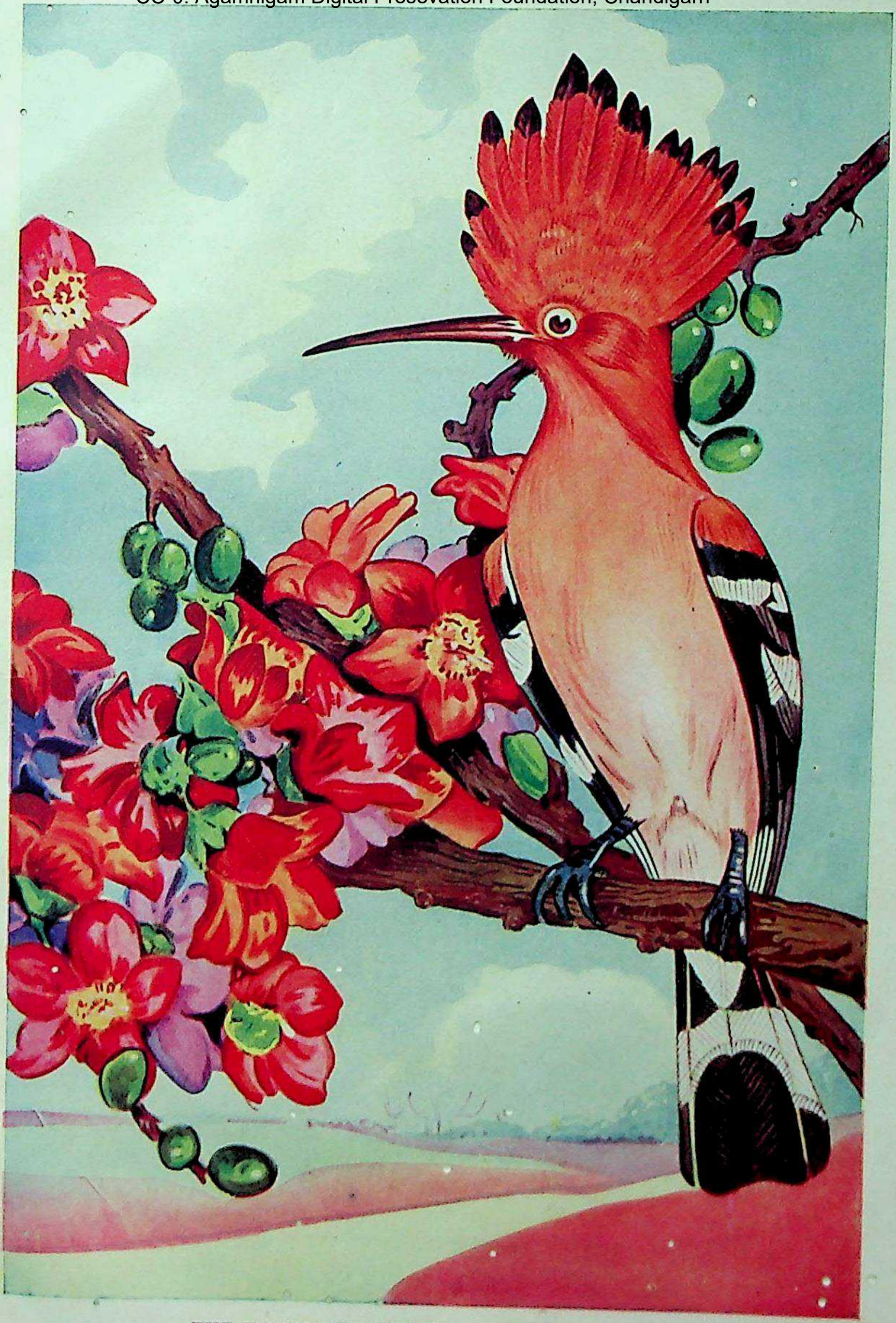
Of the transfiguration of the Hoopoe from its former mixture of Oxford and Cambridge blues to its present hues, this is the story.

In those happy days of the past, before Man had devised his drastic economic codes, and when Eve sat on a rock combing her glorious tresses while two stalwarts hit each other with clubs for the privilege of wooing her, the Rollers and Hoopoes were all one great family and lived in amity in the country that later came to be known as Austria-Hungary. From their glorious colouring these birds were sacred to the beautiful blue Danube, whose shores their presence doubly beautified.

But there came a time when that fair land was smitten by grievous drought and famine; the Danube shrank to a mere trickle, and the plains became arid deserts incapable of supporting life. Birds and beasts were dying by thousands, and eventually the Rollers decided that half of them must find a home elsewhere. Accordingly Chief Upupa Epops assembled his clans and departed.

Over the land of the Hellenes, across the Bosphorus and along the coasts of Tyre and Phoenicia he flew, finally arriving at Caanan, the land that flowed then with milk and honey as now it flows with political discontent; and it was during this migration that Epops and his people were able to do Solomon their fabled service. Female vanity decreed a crown of gold upon their heads as a reward; and when man's rapaciousness had nearly resulted in extermination, the birds exchanged the crowns for feathered crests of the same colour and departed from that land of many regrets.

Across the deserts of Arabia and Persia they flew, alighting at oases for food and water, and their plight was now terrible. Water afforded no difficulty, but the brilliant plumage of Epops' people was visible from afar in the desert, so the things that flew and crawled managed to hide before they were caught. With empty crops and weakening flight, they descended lower and lower towards the ground, eventually reaching, in a very exhausted state, a spot where Omar, the poet, sat with a book of



THE INDIAN HOOPOE (Upupa epops orientalis).

verse, a glass of wine and Her, thus making a sufficient Paradise for himself, but not for the birds.

"Oh, what beautiful birds!" She cried, as Chief Upupa Epops and his few remaining people fluttered down near them. "Catch one for me, dear. I want the feathers for my hair."

But before Omar could rise, Chief Upupa fluttered up to them and in his harsh voice, rendered all the harsher by recent privations, implored their consideration. "O great man," he said, "thou who hast a magic lute hidden in thy head, pray help us. For even as this fair lady of thine has vanity, so also have the females of our race, and it has almost been our undoing."

And he told the story of their wanderings.

The story amused Omar and his lady, and the poet, picking up his book of verse, himself wrote this verse to his companion on the flyleaf:

Listen, O Wench, and forthwith cast away
Thy vain desires, lest in the heretofore
Thou, like these birds, be brought from heaven's blue
To seek thy living on Earth's dusty floor.

Peremptorily stopping the lady's protests, but having no jurisdiction over her pouts, he laid his quill pen along Upupa's head, mixed the petals of a white rose from her with a handful of sand and, pouring this over the bird, chanted:

"*Lo! as I dipt thee in the ink, good friend*
May he oft dip thee in this sand for food,
And take its hue, that She may covet not
His plumage in her wardrobe to include.
Awake, O Muse, for here is born today
A useful friend of Man. Make him declare
His name, e'er from my feet he rises to
Display his colours in the desert air."

And lo! as Omar spoke a miracle chanced. The pen, incorporating itself with Solomon's crest, gave the bird a long, slender bill, its colouring changed from brilliant blue to the desert shades, and was spotted with the petals of the rose and the poet's ink.

But alas! Upupa Epops was struck so dumb with joy that when he and his transformed people leaped into the air they could not pronounce their new name themselves. But Roller-like, they tumbled and played, and She, clapping her hands, cried, "Oh, oh, they're like living hoops!" So Omar named them Hoopoe.

Thanking Omar, and bearing with them the insignia of his peerless craft, which they display proudly the while they keep their feathered crowns of ignominy carefully folded up, the Hoopoes went on their way rejoicing. Well fed and nourished, they eventually crossed the great river Hydaspes and so came to the fertile plains of Hindustan, where they made their homes.

Some years later, when the Hoopoes had spread over a great part of the world, Chief Upupa invited his brother, Chief Coracias of the Rollers, to pay him a visit, and unfortunately Coracias arrived during the breeding season. He was shocked at the filth and awful stench from Upupa's nest, and said cuttingly:

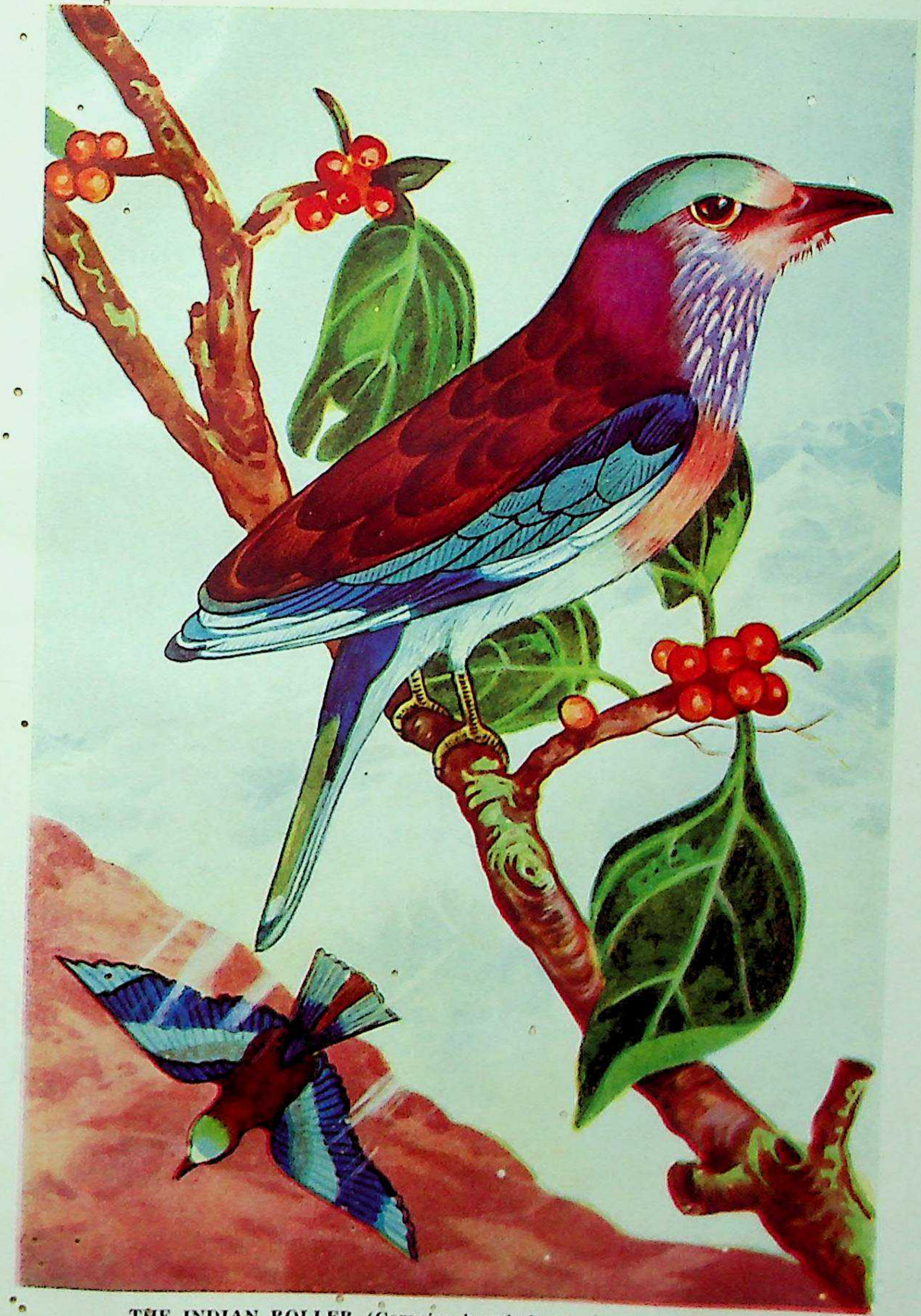
"Have you and your good lady forgotten, then, my brother, the excellent hygienic precepts of our race that you live in this stinking style?"

"Well, not exactly," Upupa replied, "but you see, someone said quite lately that we in this country were a somewhat dirty and noisy people; and one must naturally do in Rome......"

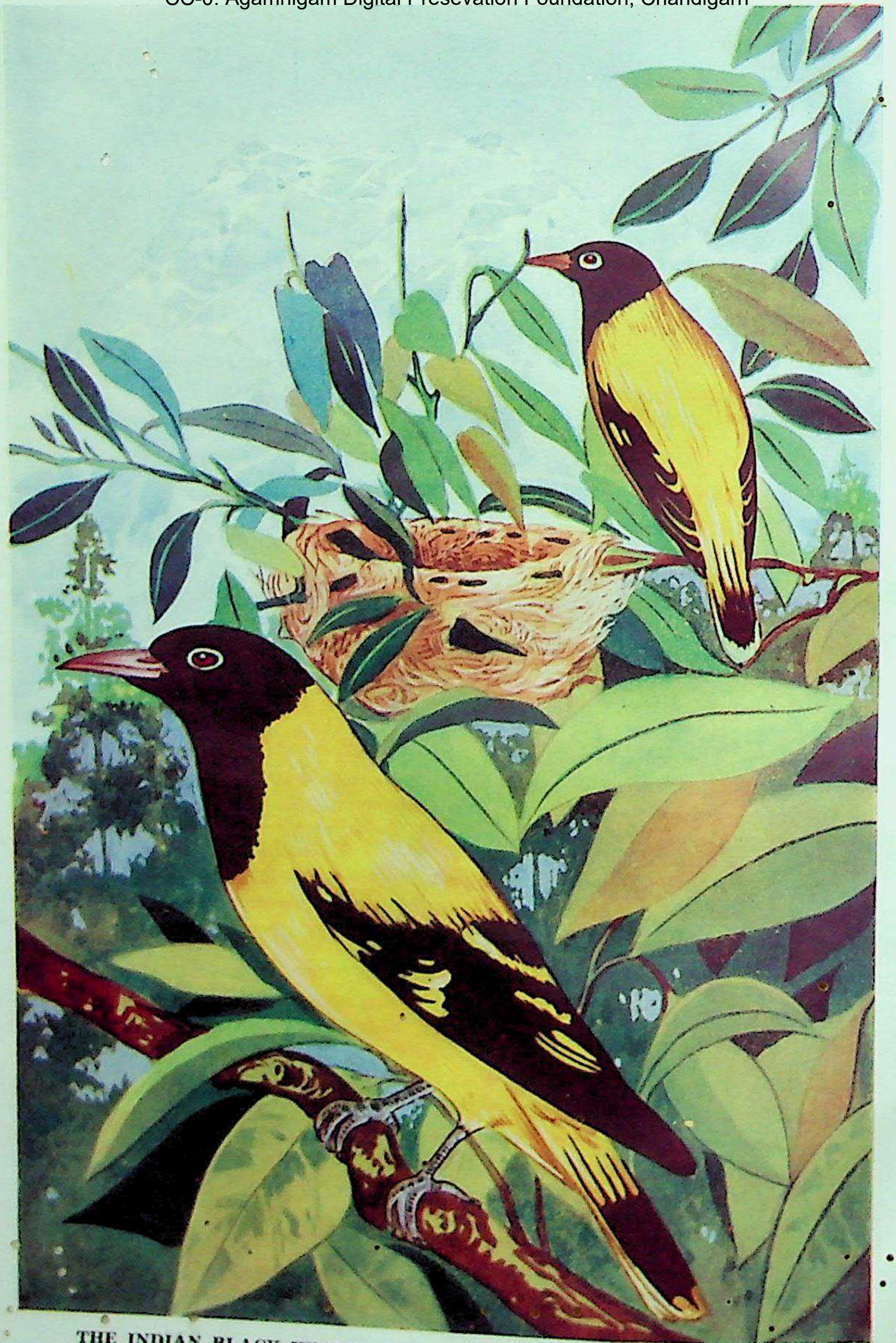
Thoroughly disgusted, Coracias flew off, perched on the topmost branch of a tall, dry tree, and there spread his wings and ruffled his feathers that the sunshine might disinfect them.

And as he sat there he was so enthrallingly beautiful and such a perfect mark that a passing pilgrim shot him and, carrying him to the temple, laid him at Durga's feet. The goddess, furious that such a lovely bird should be so ruthlessly slain, promptly resurrected him and took him under her protection, crying: "Sing thou my praises when thou art full of the joy of life."

So the Rollers became venerated as Durga's birds, and even to this day, during the breeding season, when they play and tumble together in the air, performing their wonderful acrobatics, they constantly cry the name of their patron goddess. But the Hoopoes say that it's mere affectation, and that the Rollers are merely doing as Ind does—being noisy.



THE INDIAN ROLLER (*Coracias benghalensis benghalensis*).



THE INDIAN BLACK-HEADED ORIOLE. (Oriolus zanthornus xanthornus).

The Mad Prospector and What Happend to Him

We all know that once upon a time the mines of Golconda produced many a gem of "purest ray serene" that flashed in the gorgeous turbans of mighty Indian rajas, but quite unknown is the story of where the gold came from in which those gems were set. Here it is, told for the first time.

In the far-off days of Hindustan there lived a great, proud king, who had a wonderfully beautiful daughter. The jet of ebony was in her hair; like the healthy lemon was her complexion; her eyes had the luminance and gold flecking of the black opal; the slenderness of the ringall bamboo was in her form; and her breasts were like young pomegranates, the ruby blood of which stained her lips.

But alas! instead of falling in love with a handsome prince, this lovely girl bestowed her affections on a down-at-heels prospector who, with his few belongings strapped on a buffalo, roamed the earth like a homeless Banjara as he sought for gold to enrich himself.

When the Raja came to hear of this he was, very naturally, infuriated, and promptly ordered the prospector to be put to death; but his daughter intervened violently and said that if her lover was murdered, she would kill herself.

Now this was a terrible facer for the Raja, for the princess was the daughter of a moonbeam, and it had been said at her birth that if she died before her father did, he and his kingdom would be at once blasted to eternal damnation.

So he had perforce to change his mind and ordered the prospector to be expelled from the kingdom, threatening him with the direst penalties if he ever dared to set foot in it again.

In a very vicious frame of mind the prospector set out, and whenever he saw people happy and contented, especially lovers, and thought again of the happiness he had so narrowly missed, he went berserk and began to play the very devil with them. The wandering life, the constant digging, panning and crushing of stone had made him so hard and strong that none could stand up to him. Many men tried to kill him, but the princess's mother cast a magic spell about him, so that the weapons of his assailants turned against themselves and slew them instead.

Thus, spreading a reign of terror, he wandered ever southward, and when people heard he was coming, they fled helter-skelter from his path. This, of course, was very good for him, for when he sat down to dolly for gold there was none to spy on him; and so it came about that he eventually reached a place where he found gold in plenty and settled down in peace to collect as much of it as possible, saying to himself: "When I have enough I will raise a great army, go back and win my beautiful princess, and rub her father's nose against his palace wall!"

But in the meantime his long absence fretted the princess's patience, and her father's endeavours to persuade her to marry someone else annoyed her so much that, in company with but one faithful attendant, she ran away from the palace in disguise.

Ever southward the two women plodded, and none interfered with them, for the princess's mother had changed them into two very ugly old hags.

Feeding on the fruits of the forest, drinking from the streams, and oftentimes suffering acutely from thirst and hunger (for the villagers on hearing whom they sought would give them none other than information about the way he had gone), they travelled on, and at last came to a big village in the fair *raj* of Mysore.

When the princess enquired the whereabouts of the prospector, the villagers were terrified.

"Yonder on the plain he sits at the mouth of a great hole," they said. "Goest thou then to slay him and throw him into the pit he hath dug for himself?"

"Nay," said the princess toothlessly, for she was still disguised as a hag, "I go to still the tumult in his soul. Prepare thou some good coffee against our return, and we shall reward ye well."

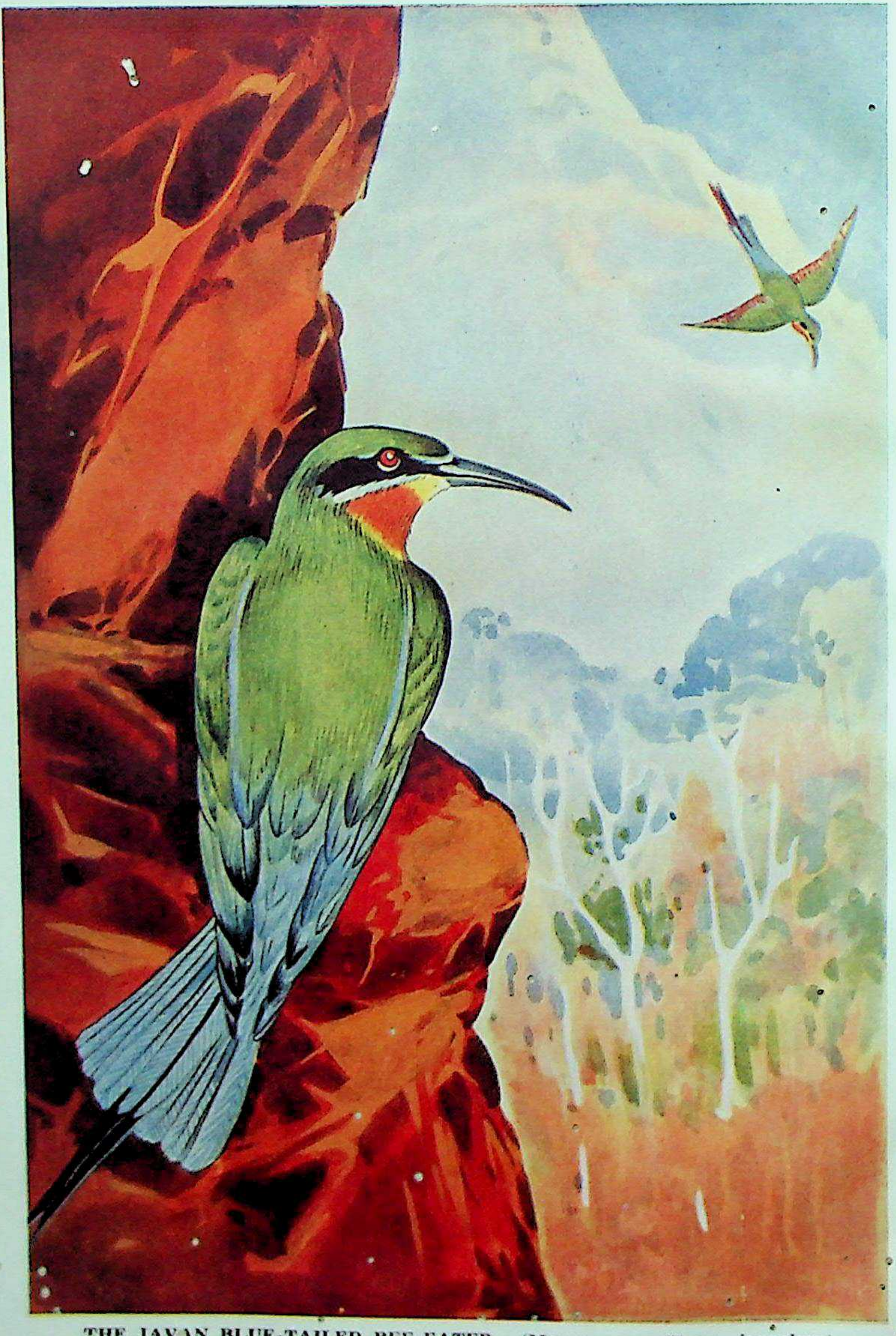
So saying, she and her attendant hobbled off across the plain, and when they came to the mouth of the hole they found a rope ladder leading down into the bowels of the earth.

"Wait thou here for me," said the princess to the woman, and as she began to descend the ladder, lo and behold! she resumed her lovely form. The ladder ended at the mouth of a tunnel, and along this the princess made her way till she came across her lover working busily by the light of moonbeams her mother had sent to his assistance.

No sooner he saw her, evil passions fled and they fell rapturously into each other's arms. But alas! the curse of the Raja overtook them at that very moment. There was a loud report like thunder, the roof of the tunnel caved in, and they were separated.

Recovering quickly, the princess began crying, "Oh, where are you? Oh, where are you?" and the prospector replied, "Here, love-lee. Here, love-lee."

In a moment they had met again, none the worse for the shock, and full of happiness and contentment, climbed out of the pit and joined the waiting woman. When she saw them she cried in the greatest consternation: "Oh, *what* has happened? Your faces are black with soot and your bodies are plastered with gold."



THE JAVAN BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER. (Merops superciliosus javanious).

"The explosion must have done that," said the prospector happily. "But don't worry now. Let us go to the village and celebrate our reunion."

When the villagers saw them, they marvelled at the prospector's happiness, at the wonderful transfiguration of the princess, but mostly at the gold adhering to their persons; and their cupidity being aroused, they put poison in their coffee, then ran off to the hole....and so was discovered to the world the Kolar gold field of Mysore.

But as the unfortunate serving-woman sat weeping and keeping the insects away from the bodies of the unfortunate lovers, the sylvan gods looked down and took pity on the trio. They turned the woman into that tenderly beautiful bird, the Bee-eater, which even today keeps its ceaseless vigil, swooping down and snapping its beak at insects.

The prospector and the princess live again as the Golden Orioles, those lovely creatures that some call the Mango Birds. And now you know the reason for their peculiar cry, their colouring, and why they are restless and go berserk when they are parted from their mates. When together, they are the sweetest tempered birds imaginable.

The Tragedy of the Triplets

The Sunbirds and that handsome creature, the Golden-backed Indian Woodpecker—you have probably seen these jewels of bird-land many times, but have you ever heard the strange story that links them together? If not, listen; or, better still, read on.

On this page appear pictures of the Sunbirds and that handsome creature, the Golden-backed Indian Woodpecker. You have probably seen these jewels of bird-land many times, but have you ever heard the strange story that links them together? If not, listen; or, better still, read on.

In those dim yet spectacular ages of the past, when the fate of the kingdoms of Ind hung daily in the balance and the troops of this great chief or that swarmed over the country, despoiling it, a villager and his wife had triplets born to them, and such bonny baby girls they were. But the villager and his wife did not appreciate this good gift of the gods, and made such an outcry against it that the story reached their Raja's ears, and he, having but one son and no daughters of his own, adopted the little girls.

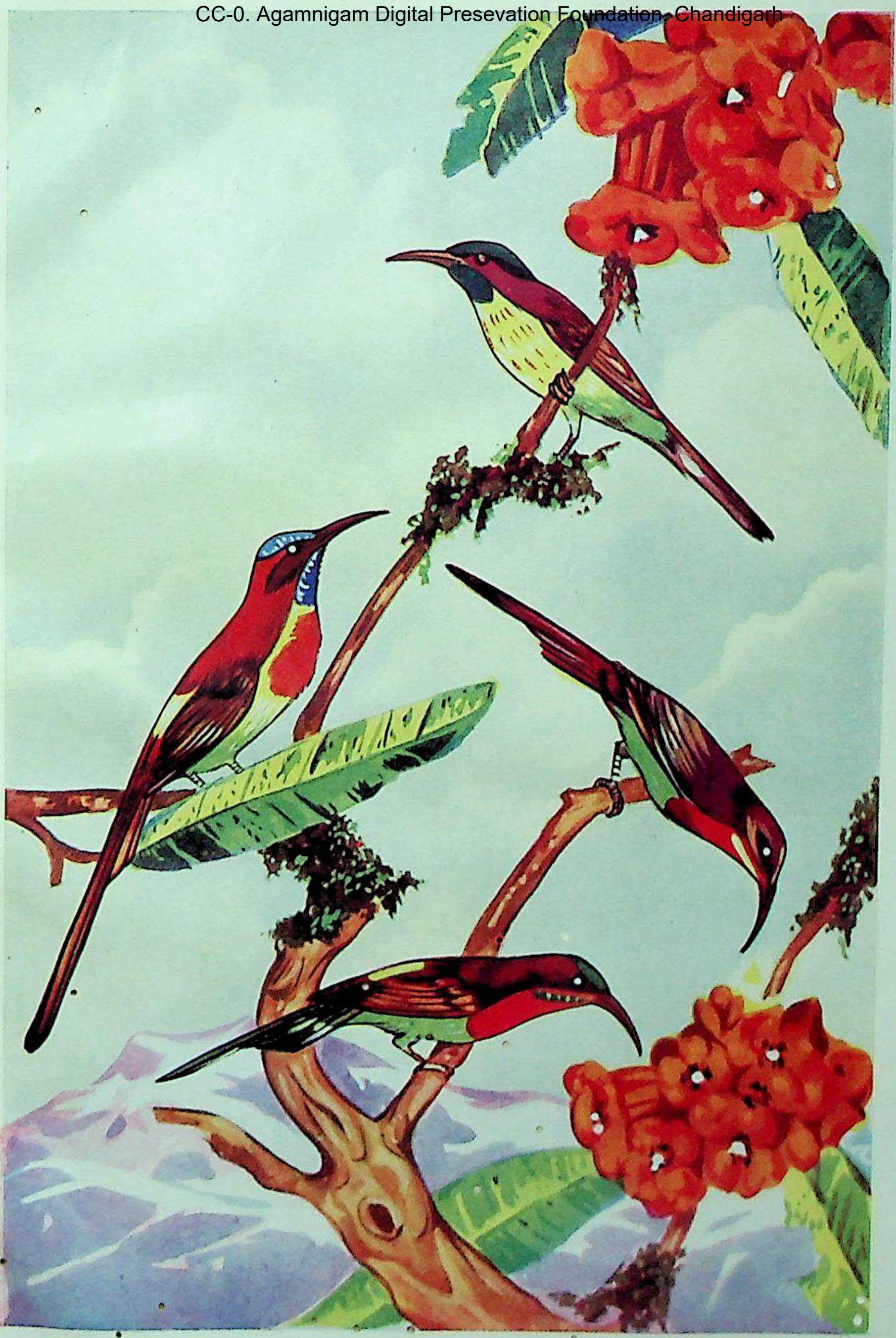
In his care the children grew and flourished, and were quite as famous in their day as the Dionne Quins are in ours. They were so pretty, and they had such lovable, winning ways, that the fame of them spread far and wide, and many rajas and ranis came to see them, conferring rich gifts and many blessings on them.

At last the girls reached marriageable age, and though the Raja did not anticipate any difficulty in finding husbands for them, he was very soon undeceived. When it became known that they were to be given in marriage, princes attracted by their renowned beauty swarmed to the state, many of them bringing retinues of fierce warriors to fight for the girls, if they could not be had by other means.

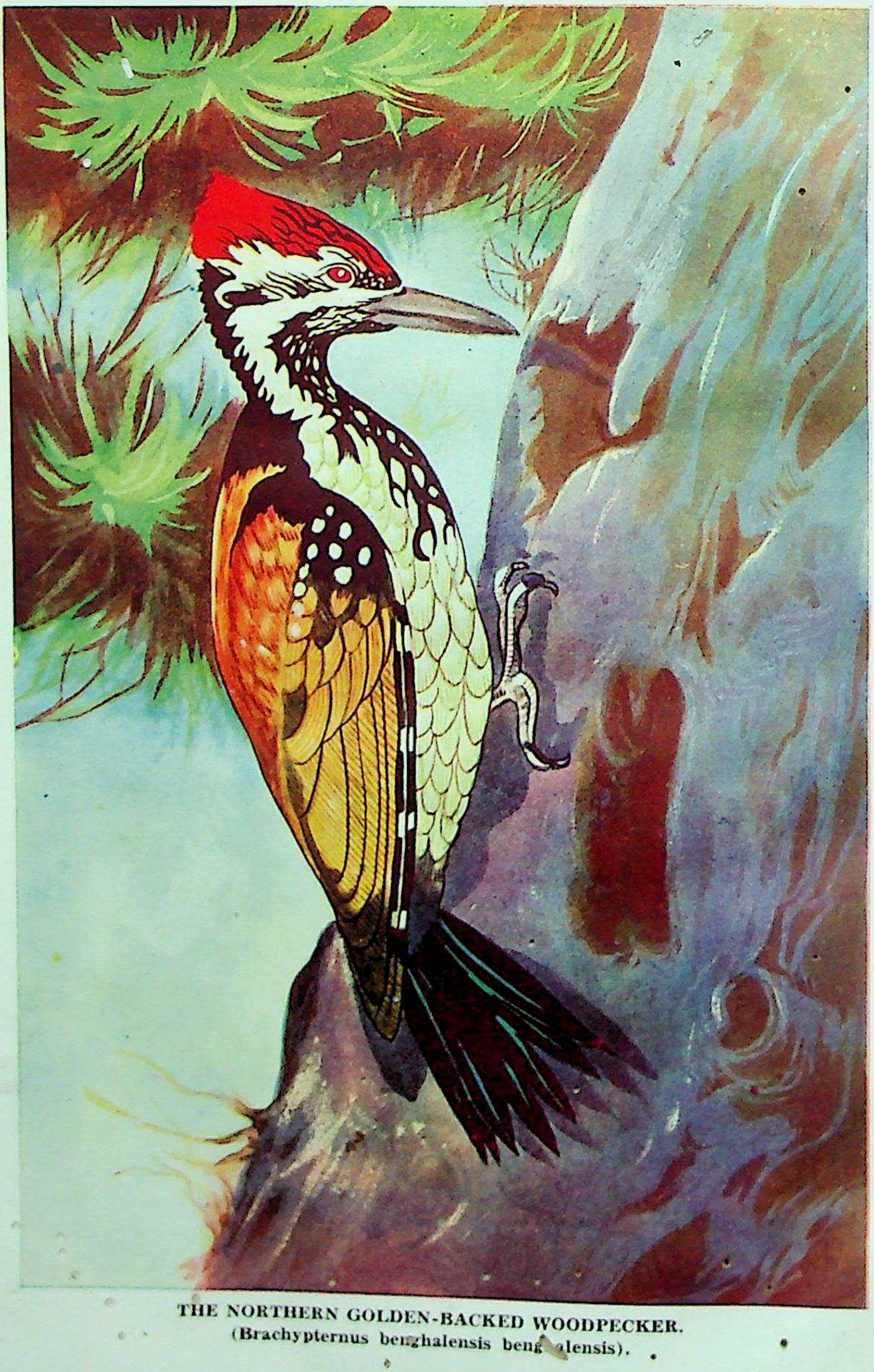
This was a pretty kettle of fish, and the Raja soon found his treasury being drained in entertaining these royal suitors, as well as his head and his lands menaced by threats from those who were likely to go away empty-handed.

"But there are only three girls!" he screamed in exasperation at the collected princes, and the only answer he got was, "Well, I want one!" from every man in the assembly.

Finally, though not till after much difficulty, it was decided to hold a great tournament at which the princes could display their prowess before the girls, who would then select each her own husband. This was very fair, and when all had agreed



THE NEPAL-YELLOW BACKED SUNBIRD. (Aethopyga nipalensis nipalensis).
THE FIRE-TAILED YELLOW-BACKED SUNBIRD. (Aethopyga ignicauda ignicauda).
THE INDIAN YELLOW-BACKED SUNBIRD. (Aethopyga siparaja seheriae).



THE NORTHERN GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER.
(Brachypternus benghalensis benghalensis).

to abide faithfully by the final decision, to be made by the girls themselves, the lists were prepared and criers went forth to announce the date.

The scenes at that great meeting between the finest and most valiant young men in Hindustan defy description. The Field of the Cloth of Gold was as nothing compared to the splendour of it; the sun wilted before the amazing radiance of the glittering accoutrements; the rainbows hid themselves because they could not match the scintillation of the jewels; and the women who watched were frantically jealous of the girls for whose benefit this peerless display had been organised.

For many days the tournament lasted, and many, many tomes would be required to tell of the great deeds that were done. Wounds were healed in a trice with wonderful unguents, strength was restored to failing arms by marvellous potions, and under the soft glances of the three beauties the young men exerted themselves to such good effect that from dawn till dusk a stupendous roar of applause rose to the clouds.

When all the princes had displayed their prowess to their satisfaction, the Raja commanded silence, and in the hush that fell over the vast assembly stood up and, loudly demanding that the girls should name their respective choices, turned livid with fright when each of them named the same man!

The tumult of shouts and imprecations that broke out was indescribable, and in the midst of it the lucky prince, brandishing a naked sabre, urged his horse to the front and demanded the magnificent prize his prowess had won. A disgruntled suitor suitor slashed at him with a sword, and a general *melee* began.

The Rȧja, fearing that his palace might be sacked, seized the opportunity afforded by the confusion to hurry the girls off and confine them in a lofty tower standing on the rampart of a hill-fort; then he told the suitors to settle their quarrel among themselves as best they could.

The winner, extricating himself first from the press, galloped off hell-for-leather to the fort, his crimson plume and golden cloak streaming behind him. Hard on his heels came the others, and the young man, dismounting at the foot of the tower, rushed up to the chamber where the girls were, and started tapping loudly on their door.

But as he reached the top, one of the others trained a big gun on the base of the tower and fired, sending the tower and all it contained to their doom. But their bodies were never found, for the gods turned the three girls into the lovely little Sunbirds we know today, and the prince into a Golden-backed Woodpecker. He still taps as vigorously on the wood of trees as he once tapped on casques and the wood of that door.

The Paradise Fly-Catcher's Story

Just as men have their peculiar difficulties, so also do birds have theirs, and once upon a time in the long ago representatives of the various Fly-catcher communities met in council to consider ways and means for bettering their lot and removing some of their grievances.

Prominent among them were the members shown alongside—Mr. and Mrs. Paradise Fly-catcher, the Nepal Beautiful Niltava, the Common Verdita, and last but not least for verve and jollity, the Yellow-bellied Fly-catcher, a happy little bird with the very long name of *Chelidorhynx hypoxanthum.*

The story goes that a press-reporter by the name of Venkatachellum attended the meeting with a leaky fountain pen in one hand, a chrysanthemum in his buttonhole and a camera in the other hand, and as he was the first reporter ever to attend a bird conference, the Fly-catchers named their smallest friend after him, bringing in his name, his ink, his hypo and his flower, but spelling these things in their own cute way.

Now at this meeting Mr. Paradise was not the beautiful bird we see in the plate. He and his wife were coloured alike, just as Mr. and Mrs. Bulbul are even to this day, and the cock bird didn't like it at all.

"Why," he shouted at the others, "should you be so beautiful, and why should Jungle Cock and Argus Pheasant and Peacock be so spectacular, when I am but drab chestnut? It isn't fair."

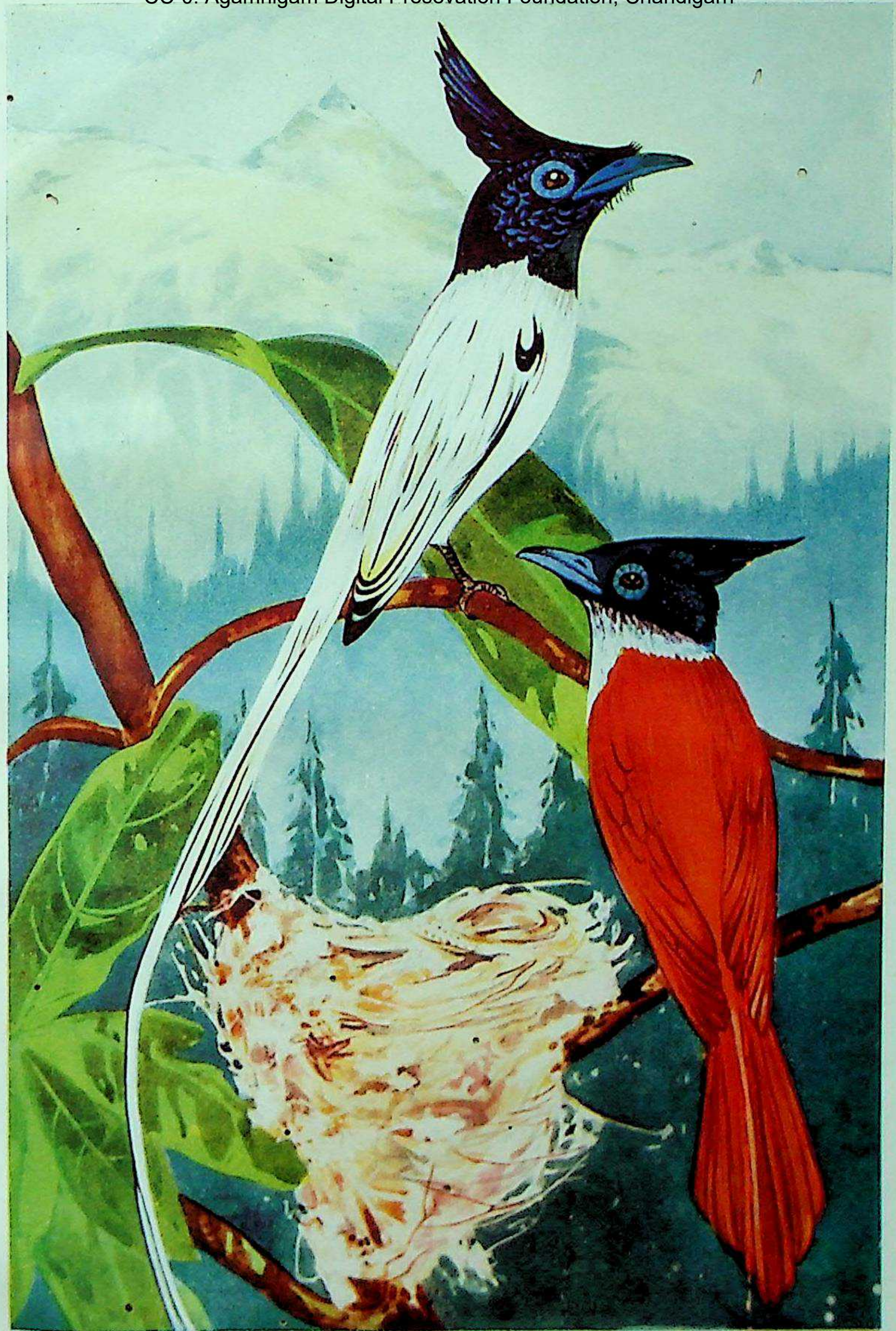
"Oh, be *quiet!*" the others grumbled. "We haven't come here to discuss your personal appearance. We're here to talk of communal interests."

But Mr. Paradise refused to hold his tongue, and the others, disgusted with his constant demands for an adjournment, finally expelled him from the meeting.

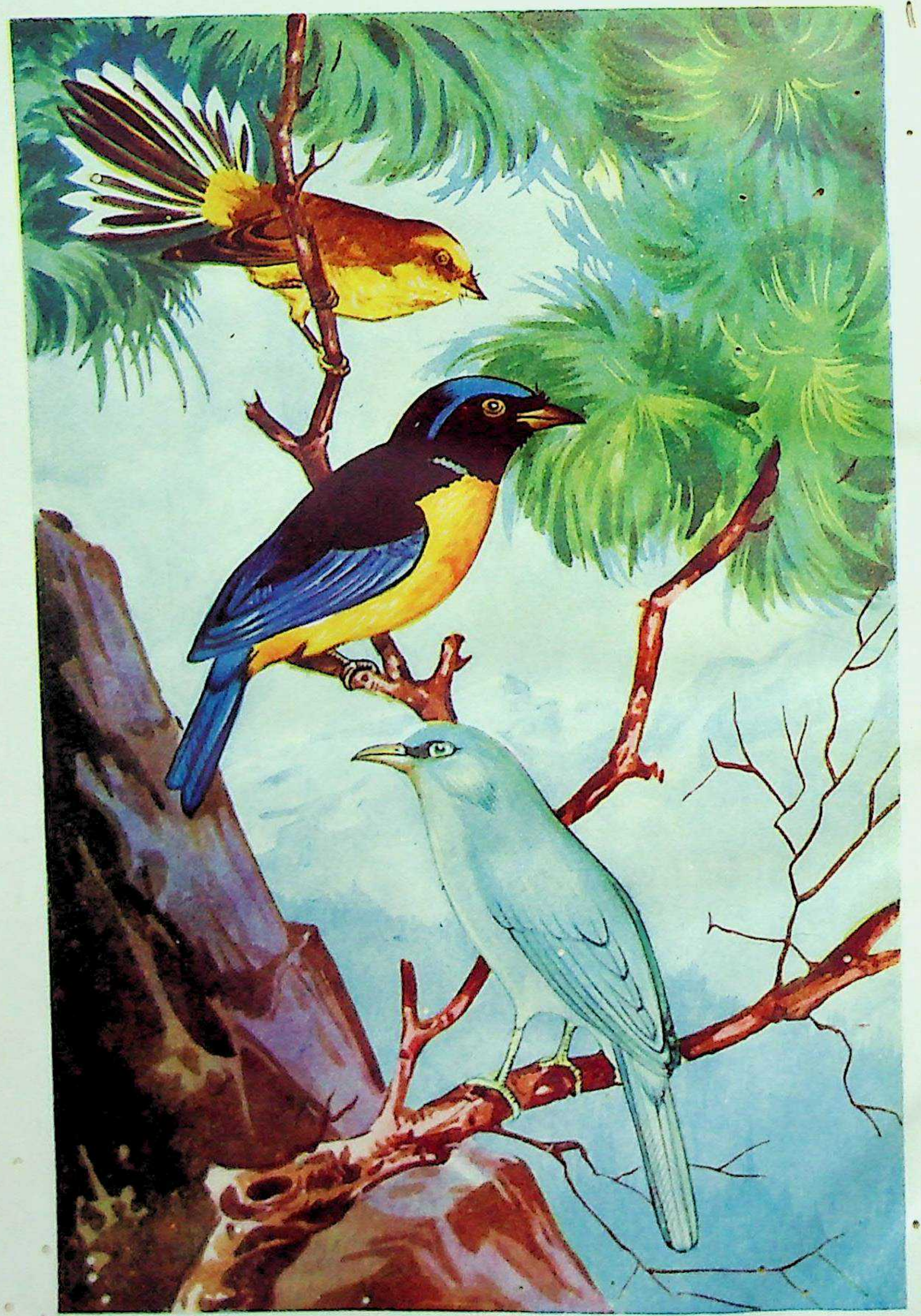
"Don't plague us with your troubles," they said. "Get out, and go and put your case before the gods."

"I'll go," shouted Paradise, his soft, bright eye growing hard with rage. "I won't be left out in the cold any longer. I'll go to Kailas."

His wife tried hard to dissuade him, but he wouldn't listen to her, and arrived at Mount Kailas on the very morning that Ganesh, Parvatti's beautiful son, was born. In this great event Mr. Paradise Fly-catcher saw his chance, and at once petitioned the proud mother:



THE INDIAN PARADISE FLY-CATCHER (Tchitrea paradisi paradisi).



THE YELLOW-BELLIED FLY-CATCHER (Chelidorhynx hypoxanthum).
THE NEPAL BEAUTIFUL NILTAVA (Niltava sundara sundara).
THE COMMON VERDITER FLY-CATCHER (Eumyias thalassina thalassina).

"O Parvati," he prayed, "so lovely a baby, who transcends by any other beauty in the world, needs a beautiful toy to play with. Give me that honour by changing this drab chestnut coat of mine into more handsome raiment."

Parvatti looked at the little bird for some time, then smiled.

"So shall it be," she said. "I shall make of thee a wondrous snowflake, a thing that will float and shimmer through the air, but be at the same time warm and palpitating, that the hands of my son may not be chilled."

No sooner had she spoken than the Paradise Fly-catcher's coat fell away from him, his plumage turned a soft, sheeny white, the two middle feathers in his tail grew long and lovely, like graceful alabaster plumes, and his crest shone as the snow on Kailas shines when the sun plays on it.

The bird was delighted. He rushed down to the brooks to view himself, then up into the branches he floated, and danced from twig to twig; and so enraptured was he with himself that instead of returning to amuse the baby, he spent all his time flitting about and telling those he met that he was the most wonderful, the most beautiful thing in all creation, more wonderful and beautiful by far than even Ganesh.

And now Parvatti grew very angry. She wanted immediately to change the bird back into what he had been, but Shiva, her husband, forbade this. "Wait," he said, "the creature has but a swollen head, and may soon begin to think again."

But Mr. Fly-Catcher didn't think again, despite the pitiful remonstrances of his wife. He went on his proud way, till at last Parvatti was so disgusted that she took a piece of charcoal and blackened his face.

"That for you, mister!" she said, "Now your wife can laugh at your stupidity always."

But Shiva, who had plenty of experience of this kind of matrimonial discord, evened the scales by turning Mrs. Fly-Catcher's face black too, so now they live in a harmony as beautiful as themselves.

The Reward of Virtue
or
The Coppersmith's Story

Once upon a time all the Barbets were coloured alike, and as some of them were good and others were bad, the good birds found themselves tarred with the same brush as the bad ones, and were truly distressed about it. They appealed here and there for assistance, but for a time nobody took any notice of them.

Then it chanced that matters went wrong in the world, and the sylvan gods found their domains being constantly menaced by the demons of the underworld. They made spirited protests to Yama, the god of Death, to keep his myrmidons in leash; but without avail. The encroachments and annoyances continued.

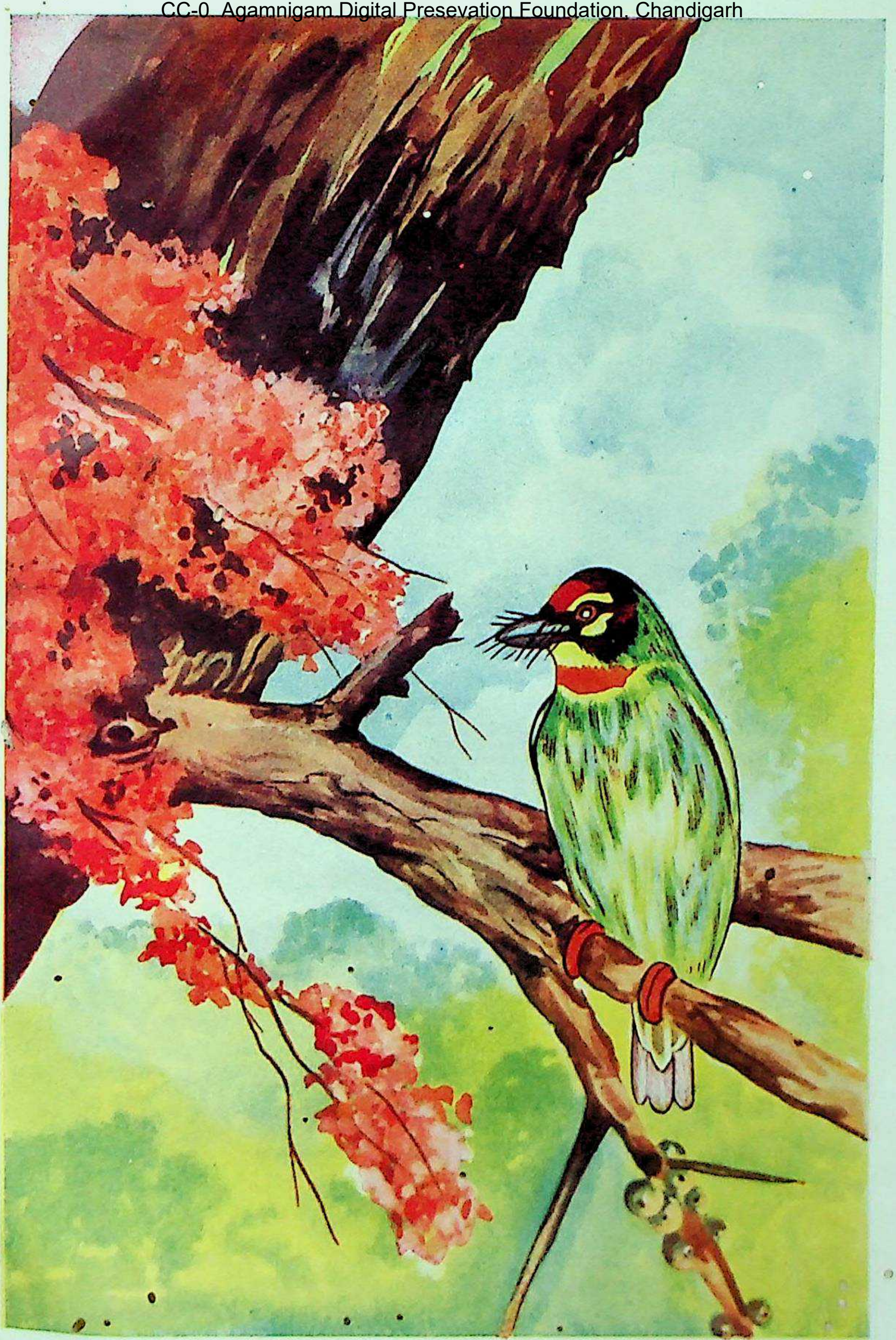
At last the sylvan gods had no option but to declare war, and rank upon rank their armies, wearing green armour and each company distinguished by nodding plumes of the various flowers of the forest, faced the scarlet, flaming hordes of devildom.

Battle was joined, and for days the fight raged terribly. The god of rain sent his sable water-carriers rolling across the sky and tried to douche the scorching flames of hell, but the god of lightning spread his brilliant sheets of fire, and lo! the rain was turned to steam and vanished. Down from the deserts of Rajputana came the lu, the terrible, suffocating sandstorms, to annihilate the snowflake regiments that Everest hurled into the fray.

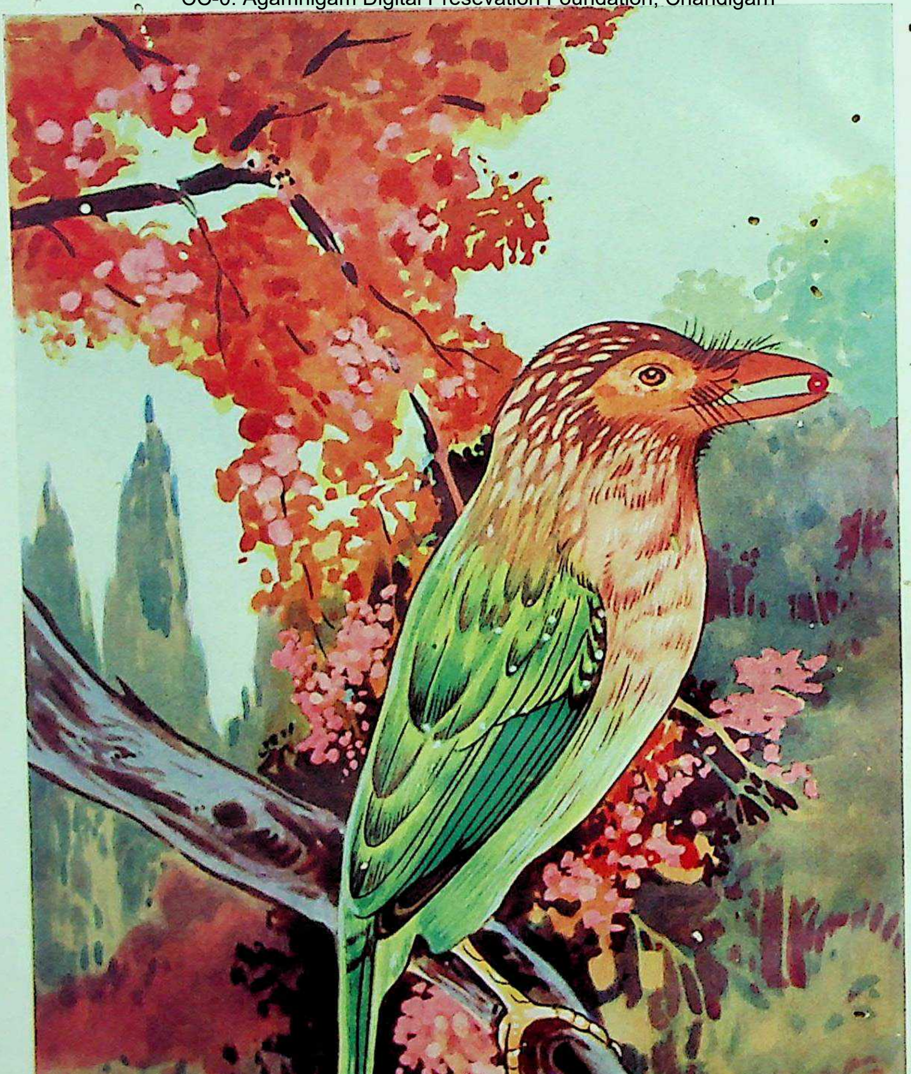
It was a great fight and a good fight, with mighty deeds of derring-do done on both sides, but at last the sylvan gods found themselves being beaten. Their shields pierced, their armour hacked to pieces, their swords and lances smashed, they were at the mercy of their foes; and in this their great hour of peril they cried to the strong-billed Barbets for assistance.

"Fly, fly to our forges," they implored, "and bring us fresh weapons and accoutrements that we may not lose the day."

The bad Barbets turned a deaf ear to these passionate appeals, but the good ones at once rose into the air on their strong wings and rushed away to the forges, where they picked up the heavy equipment the armourers had prepared and fled back with it as fast as they could.



THE INDIAN CRIMSON-BREASTED BARBET OR COPPERSMITH.
(Xantholaema Haemacephala lutea.)



THE NORTHERN GREEN BARBET. (Thereiceryx zeylanicus caniceps).

Then the tide of battle turned. New armour and new weapons gave the sylvan gods renewed strength and hope, and they counter-attacked so strongly that the demons fled shrieking before them, the wild West Wind driving down and adding to their confusion.

The carnage was terrible, but eventually the tall Bombax tree of the forest signalled the end of the slaughter by shedding its crimson, fleshy blossoms and adorning itself in a beautiful mantle of new green leaves. It burst its pods too, carpeting its feet with soft silken mattresses, on which the victorious gods threw themselves down to rest.

And when they awoke from their deep slumber, strong and refreshed, they bethought themselves of their faithful allies and summoned them.

"Ask what you will for the great service you did us, O good birds," they said, "and your request shall be granted."

Then the good Barbets repeated the petition which had already gone so often unheard: "Make us so different from our fellows, O gods," they cried, "that we may never more be besmirched by their infamy."

The sylvan gods smiled, took counsel among themselves, and finally their chief called the leader of the Barbets to him.

"As thou wishest so shall it be, O my ally," he said. "On thy breast and forehead bear thou the blood of our slain enemies, on thy cheeks the dust from our forges, on thy throat the glorious gleam of our armour, and may thy voice, resembling the tonk-tonk of our coppersmiths at work, be mysterious and misleading, that thou maymayest utter it at thy pleasure without undue risk from thine enemies."

So it was that *Xantholoema hoemacephala lutea*, the crimson-breasted Barbet or Coppersmith Bird, emerged as a distinct entity from among his cousins, and when the other Barbets saw what had been done, their cupidity was aroused. Down they came to the sylvan gods and begged for a reward too, making a hundred excuses for their defection.

They were never averse to serving faithfully, they said, but just as the snow and the rain had been banished by the enemy forces, so also had their goodwill been held in leash!

But these protestations cut no ice, and the sylvan gods ordered them to take themselves off at once—"at your peril" as a modern court summons says.

So off the disappointed Barbets went, wailing "*Kutur, kutur, kutur,*" which is their equivalent for the "*Kuchh nahin, kuchh nahin, kuchh nahin* (Nothing, nothing at all)," which some of our big business men cry when the Income Tax people come round enquiring about their profits!

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